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THE WHITE FEATHER

The White Feather

BY
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THE WHITE FEATHER

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CHAPTER I

A BLUE and golden day in September, a day when the mellowness of the sunshine, the rhythmical but even murmur of the sea, and the tranquil stillness of the air all seemed to savour of peace; and nowhere was this calm of atmosphere—something deeper than any mere quietness of the actual air—more to be felt than in the town of Eastermouth. It lies in the crescent made by a curve of sandy cliffs and is too big to be called a fishing village, too unspoilt for a watering place, and the various people who come there for their holiday each year all speak of it as if they had discovered it and held some vested right in the place.

At the Wave Crest Private Hotel, for instance, there was almost too much of this feeling, which, though gratifying to the proprietress, Mrs. Sanderson, yet sometimes caused the regular visitors to be a little stand-offish towards newcomers.

"We are like a big family, I am sure, and Mrs. Sanderson mothers us all," Miss

Myrtle, the inevitable faded spinster who was almost too elderly to be a daughter to anyone, was wont to observe.

However, when she and Mr. Pollock, the J.P., and Mrs. Sanderson herself, did melt towards anyone, then you could be quite sure that they were "all right."

Peace therefore usually held sway at Wave Crest, except for the bickerings which would occur between Miss Myrtle and Mr. Pollock—and after all, these wordy flares only increased the likeness to a family. . . .

On this September morning a sense of after-breakfast repletion brooded within the house as nearly tangibly as the sense of peace without. Yet to any observer of acute feelings both would have held a slight but ominous under-current; for, on the horizon slipping quickly along the rim of the world, went gray shape after gray shape—mere little serrated ridges to the careless, but to the understanding eye something of far deeper significance. They were destroyers, mothered by a cruiser, and high above them, so high that it looked less than one of the gulls wheeling over the retreating tide on the shore, hung a biplane. That strip of water known as the North Sea, and those gray shapes, together

made the reason why the semblance of peace was still able to brood over England even when she had been a month at war.

However, there apparently was no acute observer in the grounds of Wave Crest that morning, only a girl; and with her a slim, rather fatuous, but handsome young man in flannels, with an eyeglass, a trim little mustache, and a general air of contentment with himself and the rest of the world. He was taking some very boss shots at an old archery target with an air-gun, and seemed too lazy and too ineffectual to mind whether he hit it or not. He had hardly glanced at the portents on the blue horizon. He was the embodiment of casual content, and as for the girl with him, though to a friend's eye she would have seemed more subdued than was her wont, yet she apparently was content enough too. But, had he known it, the young man and his behavior were coming in for severe criticism on the other side of the bright brick house-wall. In Mrs. Sanderson's own private sitting-room some of her guests were assembled and they were there owing to the fact that he of the eyeglass, Mr. Christopher Brent, had, only the morning before, allowed his bath to overflow, thus

drenching the walls and ceiling of the lounge.

It was the hour sacred to the morning paper, and like many people whose habit of mind is in a narrow groove, these inmates of Wave Crest were unable to resist turning the general into the particular and personal. Mr. Pollock, according to masculine usage from time immemorial, stood in front of the grate, although no fire burned there. He was a florid, portly personage, with an expanse of head that caught the morning sun almost as brightly as did the pincenez tilted forward on his somewhat Wellingtonian nose. This nose and his upward mustache gave Mr. Pollock an air as of a retired major, a fact of which he was pleasurably aware. He was booming forth remarks like a machine gun from behind the shelter of the *Times,* and Miss Myrtle, who was wrestling with the complications of purl and plain on the sofa, allowed a nervous shudder to run through her frame at each explosion. If there be any truth in the theory that opposites make a good pair, the Fates should certainly have joined Miss Myrtle and Mr. Pollock in closer union. For she was small, thin, and desiccated-looking with gray hair

which still retained an underglow of its original sandy hue, a hue now to be more clearly seen in her complexion and eyelashes. She was attired, over her sandy-colored cashmere dress, in one of those peculiarly repellent garments falsely known as a fascinator. For she was nursing a grievance, at having "come over" chilly the evening before, and she was still nursing her chilliness in spite of the glory of the morning.

"Ha!" boomed Mr. Pollock, with satisfaction, over his *Times*. "Those beastly Germans are beginning to get what they deserve at last. Those who don't get killed in the war ought to be chloroformed off the face of the earth, by gad they ought."

Miss Myrtle, who prided herself on having a true lady's consideration for the feelings of others, cast a deprecating glance at the only other occupant of the room, Fräulein Schroeder, whose face, however, above her *Daily Mirror,* remained quite unperturbed. No one had ever seen her out of temper; she seemed to have all the placid good nature and quietude of spirit of the best of her race. Her small, kindly brown eyes beamed up now through her spectacles, and in response to Miss Myrtle's indignant: "Mr. Pollock, re-

member our friend the enemy!" she only remarked mildly:

"But you forget, both of you, I have been naturalized for twenty years. There is such a thing as a gratitude, an affection of the soul, which outweighs even the ties of blood."

"Very right sentiments, madam," declared Mr. Pollock, "and I beg to state, Miss Myrtle, that I consider myself at liberty to make whatever remarks I like in an English boarding-house."

Miss Myrtle, raising her sandy pompadour, dropped a purl—or a plain—and protested anew: "Mr. Pollock, please! Not a boarding-house! A private hotel."

"I am a plain Englishman," answered Mr. Pollock, "and I call a spade a spade."

"Indeed, yes," retorted Miss Myrtle, on a feline flash, "and a table napkin a serviette!" She allowed a larger shiver than usual to course through her person.

"Cold, madam? Feel a draught, madam?" asked Mr. Pollock, eying the fascinator with disfavor.

"Thank you, not more than usual, since I came over with my chill yesterday evening. I must say," turning so that she directed her conversation toward Fräulein Schroeder,

"that I felt distinctly hurt that Mrs. Sanderson should have refused my request for a fire here last night. I was so cold by the time I went up to bed that I could not get warm all night in spite of my bed-socks. Besides, my bedroom is by the bathroom, and I declare the damp came right through into me."

"Beautiful day," said Mr. Pollock hastily, "soon put you right." He was maneuvering to try and get the French windows open, there having already been unpleasantness on the subject between him and Miss Myrtle.

"If only one could have a fire in the evening," continued that lady, "but Mrs. Sanderson was so peculiar about it one might have thought there was some law against it."

"But, dear Miss Myrtle," put in Fräulein Schroeder, pacific as usual, "you forget that Mrs. Sanderson offered to light you a fire in your bedroom."

"Indeed," said Miss Myrtle sarcastically, "and am I to retire to my room every time I wish to get warm?"

Mr. Pollock, who liked nobody to get quarrelsome but himself, here broke in with: "All that idiot Brent's fault; fancy letting his bath run over! Never heard of such a thing!

Upon my soul, I think Mrs. Sanderson's been most patient, considering the condition of the lounge."

"That is very true," said Fräulein. "Have you seen the ceiling, Mr. Pollock?"

"Yes, and the carpet," said Mr. Pollock, "that's past praying for. Really, irresponsible idiots like Brent should not be allowed loose, they are a danger to the public. Should have thought myself that he could have found something better to do than mooning about at the seaside at a time like this." He folded the *Times* afresh and pounced on a new paragraph like a dog on a bone. "By gad, have you seen this, Miss Myrtle?" he demanded. "Another spy caught hanging round some waterworks—trying to put germs in the reservoir, I'll bet my hat; and they haven't shot him! Haven't even imprisoned him! Discharged him with a caution! Just like we English, a sentimental set of idiots! If *I* were head of the War Office——" But what Mr. Pollock would have done to set the nation and the Army to rights had he been in a position to do so, was not to be unveiled just then, for he was interrupted by the quick ring of footsteps on the paved veranda, as a very personable

young man came briskly up to the window and rapped upon it. He was somewhat sketchily attired in puttees and khaki riding-breeches and an old Norfolk coat. He was reddened by sun and wind and aggressively healthy of aspect, and above all, he looked exactly what we mean when we say a man is "thoroughly English." Fräulein came out of the *feuilleton* to gaze at this apparition. Miss Myrtle seemed to have fresh life blown into her as she sat, and the irascible J.P., dropping his paper, bounded forward to unlatch the window, the window which had already been the cause of friction and which he now artfully neglected to close.

"Come in, come in, Pennicuik, my boy," he cried. He was the kind of man who always called his fellows "my boy" or "old chap." "Come in and show yourself. So you have placed your services at the disposal of your country, have you? Glad to hear it, my boy, glad to hear it."

Mr. Percival Pennicuik, a deeper red than usual suffusing his nice, boyish face, came in half-laughing, half-shy.

Miss Myrtle gave a little shiver which had the double effect of being a slight reproach to Mr. Pollock about the window and of

drawing attention to herself. She simpered. Mr. Pollock, rightly guessing what she wanted, introduced the new-comer.

"Let me introduce you. Mr. Pennicuik, an old friend of mine and Molly's. Miss Myrtle, Miss—er—Smith."

"Smith?" queried Fräulein, with a certain dignity that became her skimpy little person not badly; "you mistake, Mr. Pollock—my name is Schroeder."

Mr. Pollock's face rivaled the ingenuous Mr. Pennicuik's in hue. "Oh, ah, of course, if you prefer it," he commented. "I only thought that you, being naturalized, might prefer——"

"I am not ashamed of my ancestry," replied the little woman, still unappeased.

"No, no, of course not," fluttered Mr. Pollock. "Shouldn't blame you if you were, though. Upon my soul I shouldn't. Pennicuik, this is Fräulein Schroeder."

"How do you do?" said Fräulein, looking at the visitor, who had stood rather awkwardly during this altercation. "So you have turned soldier? That is good. But why do you not wear uniform? If the Germans come over here and capture you they will shoot you."

"There was such a rush of fellows to enlist, they simply couldn't keep pace with them," said Pennicuik cheerily. His besetting sin was a tendency towards breeziness. "I say, Mr. Pollock, when Molly wrote me that you and she were down here she said Brent was here too. . . ."

All the answer vouchsafed to this by Mr. Pollock was a groan.

"But isn't he *doing* anything?" asked Pennicuik with incredulity in his pleasant young voice.

"He certainly isn't doing anything at present and I haven't heard if he thinks of it," snapped Mr. Pollock.

Evidently the eyeglassed personage amusing himself in the garden with the air-gun was no favorite of his.

There was a second of silence, then Pennicuik, with a loyalty that was part of his simple, eminently "nice" nature, said: "Oh, well, I'm sure he must have a reason for whatever he does or doesn't do about it, or Molly could not like him so much. . . ."

"I do not think Mr. Brent is a person who troubles himself with reasons good or bad," remarked Miss Myrtle. "He is quite content to drift on."

"Brent certainly is not overburdened with brains," agreed Mr. Pollock, "but, then, what have brains got to do with being a soldier?"

"Yes, you can blot out Germans just as well without 'em," said Pennicuik simply. "I don't understand Brent, I must say."

There certainly was a strong feeling against Mr. Brent in the sitting-room that morning. If it be true that a thought-wave has a definite effect on the subject thought about, a perfect flood-tide was gathering itself together to expend itself in the direction of Mr. Brent. Of all the people in that house, each one had had his or her thoughts turned toward him by his misadventure with the bath water. No landlady could, of course, confront such a catastrophe unmoved. Mr. Pollock and Miss Myrtle were both, in spite of their very different natures, of the order of people who criticise as they breathe. Even Fräulein, with her tendency to look for the best in everyone, could not deny that Mr. Brent seemed to be doing a lot of harm and no good; and now here was Pennicuik, a mere casual visitor, entering into the lists of criticism. There were probably only two people in the house who felt kindly disposed toward

the attractive if ineffective young man, and they were both women. One of them, of course, was Mr. Pollock's daughter, Molly; the other—and here was one new cause of grievance against Brent—was a very charming widow who had arrived only the evening before.

Mrs. Lee had not, of course, had time to develop a strong liking or partisanship on behalf of Brent, but she had played "snooker" with him most of the evening and been amiable over the marmalade during breakfast. What more is needed to cause comment in a boarding-house? It had caused comment already and the subject now came up again.

"If you ask me," said Miss Myrtle, "I think Mr. Brent is too fond of playing about with the ladies to undertake anything that would interfere with that. Mrs. Lee comes from Heaven only knows where, and I consider she is very over-dressed—or should I say, perhaps, under-dressed?"

"Oh, Miss Myrtle, you are cruel," expostulated Fräulein Schroeder.

"I have called attention to no more than we could all see for ourselves, and Mr. Brent certainly hung round her very obviously."

"Brent monopolized her," said Mr. Pollock. "Very bad form, I call it. There she goes across the garden now. Very smart white suit she has on, Miss Myrtle, whatever you may say." He strode to the window and stood looking out. "Oh, my goodness," he added, "here comes that chattering Kidlington girl. She'll come in at the front door; we may just escape her if we clear out this way. Ever met her, Pennicuik?"

"Good Lord, yes," said Pennicuik. "When the 1st Manchesters were down here she and her sister were known as the 'Manchester Harriers.' Here, let's do a bunk. I'm rather keen to meet your widow."

The two men passed out through the French window, leaving a sudden silence and emptiness behind them. Miss Myrtle, gathering up her knitting and apparently forgetting her chilliness, arose and made towards the window also. She was one of those numerous people who, having no particular object in life, spend themselves in futile but persistent hitting at anyone much discussed, much as a wasp knocks itself again and again against the larder window.

The kindly disposed widow was already making toward Christopher Brent, and, a lit-

tle in her rear, the varying degrees of antipathies to him in the persons of Pollock, Pennicuik, and Miss Myrtle were also converging toward him in the bright sunlight.

There remained in the sitting-room only Fräulein Schroeder, and she was too colorless and insignificant a personality for her actions to matter either way.

CHAPTER II

Fräulein Schroeder was still sitting in the room, a black blot in the midst of its bright chintzes, when a young lady burst in from the passage. She was a pretty girl in the dark, eager, intense style, with rather too much color, and a mouth that would become thin and hard with years. On her arm she carried a large basket full of a soft drifted whiteness. She paused abruptly on seeing only Fräulein.

"Oh, good-morning," she began, speaking in a high, rapid voice. "Can you tell me where everyone is?"

Fräulein Schroeder put down the *Mirror* and took up her singularly plain and useful-looking knitting before replying:

"Mrs. Sanderson is interviewing the cook and Mr. Sanderson is not down from the Admiralty yet. The others are, I believe, somewhere in the garden."

Daphne Kidlington thanked her and ran on through the open window. The wind of her going made one or two particles of the

drifted whiteness in her basket float out, and, weaving a gentle zigzag course through the air, they showed themselves to be feathers. They settled in delicate crescents on the carpet, up-tilted at either end like unsubstantial fairy-craft. Fräulein Schroeder looked at them for a moment through her gold-rimmed spectacles with the ghost of a placid smile about her dry, tucked-in little mouth.

Daphne, heedless, ran across the lawn and joined the little group she saw there. She knew them all with the exception of Mrs. Lee, and she stared with frank curiosity at the tall handsome woman, mentally dubbing her *passée*. Mrs. Lee was, as a matter of fact, a very good-looking woman of about thirty-five, who gave the impression of being at once too proud and too occupied with other matters to have troubled to preserve an illusion of youth. This in a way added to her charm as it showed her own confidence in it, a confidence which was not misplaced. From her swathed auburn hair to her white shoes she was the type of an attractive, well-poised woman of the world. She made Molly Pollock, who was standing beside her, seem obvious in her English prettiness. And yet Molly Pollock was excessively pretty. It was

at present her outstanding characteristic. It might be wondered what Christopher Brent, who for all his fatuousness had traveled widely and seen a lot of the world, found to hold him in her.

It was exactly the fact that Molly at present was nothing but the traditional English girl which enthralled him. She was cream and roses, she was a summer's day, she was the scent of clover, she was all the things that come to a man's mind at night when he is lying out under the African stars or beside his fire in the wilds of Canada. She was, in short, all that most men consciously or unconsciously wish for in a wife—all heart and an unawakened brain, all sentiment and no passion. The interesting thing to anyone who could get past her triumphant prettiness enough to consider the matter would have been to wonder exactly how far it would improve Molly if a character were awakened in her. At present everyone was content with the roundness of her chin, the slight upward tilt of her nose, the sweetness of her full but flexible mouth, and the clearness of her wide hazel eyes. What need to look further when a young creature adds to all this an unaffectedly sweet disposition? Nobody did look

further, least of all Molly herself, nobody, that is to say, except Christopher Brent, and it was just this conformity to type in Molly, a type of which she was the supreme expression, that he loved her for. In charm, in intelligence, in poise, Molly could be no rival to Mrs. Lee, but it was on Molly that Christopher's eyes and his heart rested. He was standing a little behind her now, where he could see the golden down on her nape, blurred by the sun, and could see, too, the curve of her delicately rosy cheek. He saw an added flush deepen on it as she stepped forward to meet young Pennicuik with a friendly, "Hullo, Percy! This is jolly!" The greetings were hardly over before Daphne Kidlington, breathless, came up.

"Good-morning, everybody," said Daphne brightly.

Various good-mornings in different tones of flatness answered her.

Daphne's intense enthusiasms were apt to be a strain on other people, and this morning it was obvious by the increased aggression of her aspect that more was in the wind than usual.

Miss Kidlington was a supremely unimportant little person, but the high gods often

employ such for big results, and so it was to be with her that morning.

She flitted on to the scene and off it like a gadfly, but her white feathers might have been poison in the far-reaching effects which they left behind them.

"Why, Daphne!" cried Molly, in a startled note of incredulity, "what have you got in that basket?"

"Feathers," said Daphne, adding with increased emphasis, "white feathers."

Miss Myrtle, bending forward so that her pincenez threatened to take a header off her attenuated nose, stirred an inquisitive finger round in the basket.

"So they are," she ejaculated. "Feathers. What are you going to do with them, Miss Kidlington? Stuff cushions?"

"No. I am going to present one to every young man I meet who has not enlisted. That's what I came about, to see whether Molly would come down to the beach with me. We girls should do our little share just as much as the men, shouldn't we, Mr. Pollock?"

"Molly certainly shan't go making a fool of herself on the front," replied that gentleman emphatically, "and if you wish to know

what I think, Miss Kidlington, I think you are talking a pack of nonsense. What good do you suppose you are going to do by setting the men's backs up, eh?"

"I think it's perfectly horrid of you," said Molly, coming forward and stepping, apparently by accident, in front of Brent as she did so.

"My dear Molly," replied Daphne, somewhat cattily, "those whom the cap fits may wear it. What about Mrs. Sanderson's son? Has he enlisted?"

"My dear Miss Daphne," said Mr. Pollock, "don't you make a bloomer over young Sanderson. He's in the Admiralty."

"Of course, how stupid of me," replied Daphne, who was perfectly well aware of the fact and was only leading up to what she had to say, "and what about you, Mr. Brent? But I suppose you have made all your arrangements to join something already?"

"It's really no business of yours, Daphne," said Molly resentfully.

"Fact is, Brent has not decided yet what he shall join," chimed in Mr. Pollock, who, if criticisms had to be made, preferred to keep them in the family and make them himself.

Brent himself had made no answer, but

his good-looking face, usually mask-like, seemed to lose some of its fatuous expression in an involuntary sharpening and hardening. There was a painful silence, broken by a strong whirring of wings as two or three pigeons, hoping for food, swooped down from the pigeon-cote in the yard and circled round the heads of the little group on the lawn.

Miss Myrtle, priding herself on her tact, seized verbally on this diversion.

"Talking of feathers," she said brightly, "those pigeons would certainly be confiscated, I suppose, if Mrs. Sanderson weren't English."

"Oh, why?" drawled Brent, speaking for the first time and fixing his eyeglass more firmly to gaze at the birds in question.

"Oh, spies use pigeons and things," said Miss Myrtle vaguely. "And Mrs. Sanderson is so devoted to them, makes quite pets of them. I often wonder how she can bring herself to have them cooked."

"I am glad she does," declared Mr. Pollock, for once following Miss Myrtle's lead. "Very good pies they make."

But Daphne was not to be so lightly diverted from her purpose.

"So you *are* going to join something, Mr. Brent?" she insisted.

"Why, no, don't know that I am," said Brent.

"Daphne," said Molly in a low voice. "Please don't."

"Oh, don't stop her, please," said Brent, taking out his pipe. "It's awfully becoming to Miss Daphne to look so serious." He blew down his pipe as he spoke, then squinted at it doubtfully.

" I am only doing my duty," Daphne continued, rummaging in her basket and extracting the largest feather she could find. "Here you are, Mr. Brent. It is only a feather, but please notice the color."

Brent took it and let it lie for a moment in his lean brown palm. Then he began quite gayly to stuff it down the stem of his pipe.

"It is very nice of you to give me such a smart one," he said genially, "but I can't say the color of my pipe cleaners worries me very much. Thanks awfully, all the same. I suppose you saw I was in difficulties with my pipe. It's jolly hard to get a decent pipe cleaner down here, as Mrs. Sanderson won't let us pluck the pigeons and I can't shoot so

much as a sitting gull. Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a sovereign for your little lot and you can pass it on to the Prince of Wales's Fund. Done?"

"Mr. Brent," replied Daphne, drawing herself up, "you little know me."

"My dear girl," replied the young man, dropping his pose and turning slightly away with a shrug of his shoulders, "if you aren't jolly careful, you'll find that nobody will know you."

Molly stamped her foot on the soft turf. "Now you have sufficiently insulted Mr. Brent, and made us all uncomfortable, perhaps you will go, Daphne," she said.

"Of course, if I am not wanted . . ."

"You aren't," said Molly, the dignified brevity of her utterance marred by a suspicious shake in her voice.

Daphne took the hint, and looking round the little group to meet only unsympathetic glances, for, as has been said, the whole of Wave Crest would band together against an intruder, she flung off down the drive, basket on arm. As in the sitting-room, the soft white feathers floated out behind her and marked her way. She was gone, but she had left a more definite mark than those little white

symbols behind her, a mark less easily brushed aside.

Nobody quite liked to look at each other for a moment after her departure.

Brent was the first to speak as he tossed the soiled feather carelessly aside and began to fill his pipe.

"Jolly time the fellows on the beach are going to have," he remarked.

"Horrid little pig!" said Molly.

"Jolly bad form," added Mr. Pennicuik uneasily.

"All the same," was Mr. Pollock's contribution, "some of her feathers may be deserved, though she goes the wrong way to work."

"Quite so," agreed Miss Myrtle. "Mr. Brent, painful as it has been to me to witness your ordeal, I hope that the significance of it will make you think." Rather wisely evading a reply, she departed toward the sitting-room again, trying to wield her needles as she went, though her fingers trembled slightly with her own temerity.

"Upon my soul!" exploded Mr. Pollock, "I don't often agree with that cat of an old maid, but I must say I think she is right this time." He, too, turned and went,

though in the opposite direction to that taken by Miss Myrtle.

"That was a nasty one," murmured Brent placidly as he lit his pipe.

"Oh, Chris," said Molly, "how can you take it lying down? Why don't you tell them that you are going to do something, you must. . . ."

"Why, Miss Pollock," suggested Mrs. Lee, who had been a silent spectator of the whole little scene, "surely ill-breeding like that is beneath contempt. One does not have to answer it."

"Oh, I know," said Molly, struggling to keep back tears of mortification, "but—but —Percy," turning swiftly to young Pennicuik, "isn't it time you took me down to see that camp you promised?"

"Right oh," replied Mr. Pennicuik, in tones of undisguised relief. "We can just do it if we hurry. Good-by, Mrs. Lee; see you later, Brent," and he took himself away with Molly.

Brent stooped and picked up the feather he had thrown away, twirling it between his fingers.

"All the same, Miriam," said he elliptically, "it is hard, it is damned hard."

CHAPTER III

Down in the town, Percy and Molly made inquiries as to a territorial camp which was situated a mile or two out of it on the further side.

With the peculiar apathy of the denizens of seaside places, no one seemed to know much about it or to take any interest in it. But Pennicuik assured Molly that if she were allowed to see at least part of it she would find it most interesting, and accordingly they set off along the white country road, which curved gently up to the down-land where the camp lay.

Molly felt her spirits reviving in the bright, soft air with the faint but exhilarating tang of autumn in it. That strained little scene on the lawn fell toward a back place in her mind, which by habit lived in the present moment. Nevertheless the feeling of unrest and the racking doubt which had begun to beset her refused to be quite stilled. She glanced up at Percy as they walked along, at his sun-burned, open coun-

tenance, with its rather obvious comeliness, and conscious of her gaze he looked down at her. His eyes were his best feature, very blue and clear, and Molly could not help noticing how fresh and revealing the expression of them was. Pennicuik's eyes told that up till now he had nothing in his life to conceal. Molly suddenly realized that she was always aware of secrets behind Brent's look, of things which he did not choose she should know. Already a little sore at the attention he paid Mrs. Lee, more puzzled than she would own at his refusal to "do anything" for his country, she now felt a sudden revulsion against all ways that were not simple and straight and plain. Her heart warmed to Percy with a sudden feeling that restfulness and strength were to be found in simple unintellectual honesty such as his.

For the moment the glamor that Chris had over her wavered and grew uncertain.

The camp proved a disappointment in that all the men had left for a destination unknown the night before. Only a few not going on active service remained behind to tidy things up. Still, to Molly, new to such things, even the traces of the camp held

interest and a certain magic. Here were black scars made of charred soil and ash where the fires had been. Across the fields khaki-clad figures were bringing in wagon loads of fodder. Round a gypsy pot slung over some embers a group of men sat in trousers and shirts, one or two were cleaning their rifles, a sight which thrilled Molly. Thanks to the men having gone, Molly was allowed to wander where she would, and a chatty young Territorial, a bank clerk from the town, showed her and Percy the little there was to see, and Molly could not help noticing that, though he treated her with a certain patronizing politeness, he evidently looked up to Pennicuik. Would he have respected Chris, she wondered, if he had lounged over the camp, eyeglass in eye? Then she told herself that it didn't really matter what a young man, who kept on referring to the "ladies" did or did not do.

"Glad you enjoyed it," the youth remarked to her as they parted. "I know the ladies always like seeing these things. They love a uniform, don't they?" This last to Pennicuik, as one male to another.

"Well, that was rather disappointing, I'm afraid," observed Percy as they left the trod-

den field for the road once more. "Still, of course, it's always something for you, as the fellow said. You haven't seen anything of soldiering, have you?" The next moment he could have shaken himself for his tactlessness, fearful lest what he had said might seem a deliberate slight on Brent.

Molly did not take it that way. "No, I haven't yet," she said. "I say, Percy, what do you think of Mrs. Lee?"

Molly was still at the stage when the question of Brent's predilection for another woman was more important than whether he was justified in refusing to enlist or not.

"Of Mrs. Lee?" echoed Percy, his masculine mind quite failing to connect up. "I don't know. I don't think anything about her. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, only she interests me. She's very fascinating I think, don't you, Percy?"

"I don't care for red hair myself," replied the Philistine, "besides, she's so old; and I like a woman to dress more quietly, I must say." Percy came from the same suburb as the Pollocks, and while his ideas on the way a girl should dress were rightly taken from Molly's pretty but simple frocks, his

notions of what was becoming to an older woman were unfortunately derived from long intercourse with his mother.

Curiously enough, instead of being relieved by Percy's verdict, Molly was depressed still further by it, for she could see that it was not lack of charm on Mrs. Lee's part but the intelligence to appreciate it upon Pennicuik's that made his opinion.

"She's very fascinating, all the same," persisted Molly stubbornly. "I think so, anyway, and so does Chris." She threw this remark off casually, as who should say, "You see how broad-minded I am. I quite realize that he sees things to admire in other women and I don't mind it a bit."

"Then he oughtn't to," said Percy, whose opinions on the personal equation of love and marriage were the same as Molly's. "And you know you don't quite like it either," he went on, "and you are behaving splendidly about it and about everything else. Molly, you aren't happy. I'm sure you are not, and I can't tell you how rotten it makes me feel. I'd do anything to make you happy, you know."

They had come to a place where a winding path led down the low, sandy cliff to the

beach, and both instinctively turned their steps toward it. Conversation was not possible while Percy was helping Molly down the steep path. The soft powdery sand at the cliff's foot looked so inviting that they sat down on it to rest for a while. Molly's fingers played mechanically with a tuft of rustling thrift and she stared out at the blue but slightly misty horizon with troubled eyes. Percy, sitting beside her, was acutely conscious of her nearness and of the slender curve of her throat and chin, and her soft, drooping mouth. He plunged his hands deep into the sand on either side of him and stared at her with his heart in his look.

"Not quite happy," Molly admitted. "There are things I don't understand. Life seems to be becoming a little different from anything I expected somehow, and I don't like it. Oh, Percy, why can't things always go on being nice!"

"They're never nice at all for some of us," said Percy a little unsteadily. "There are fellows who never get anything. And after all, Brent is engaged to you, isn't he? You've never told me . . . but I couldn't help guessing. Can't you trust me, Molly?"

Molly turned her eyes on him, and through

the thick covering of her preoccupation with her own feelings she was vaguely aware that he, too, seemed troubled. It was certainly very nice of dear old Percy to mind about her happiness so much. It would be idle to pretend that Molly did not know that Percy's affection for her was not of the same quality as hers for him, or that the knowledge did not give her a certain half-shamed pleasure. Passion was such an unknown quantity to her that she hardly understood even that it existed, and though Percy himself would have been slightly shocked at the connection of passion with Molly, yet in the nature of things his love for her was not without it.

"You are a dear, Percy," said Molly, and put her hand on his wrist. "Yes, Chris and I have been engaged since the beginning of the summer. I—I wanted to keep it to ourselves for a while, because it seemed too beautiful to spoil by telling. And then the war broke out and father took a dislike to Chris because of his not enlisting, and so . . ."

Percy's fingers clutched into the sand, then gave up the struggle and, emerging, took hold of Molly's.

"Molly," he began, "I—I can't bear you

not to be happy. Don't be angry with me for saying it, but I'm sure you won't be happy with Brent. You can't be. He's an awfully attractive chap and all that, but he's not the sort of fellow to make a woman happy, and oh, Molly, I do care about you most frightfully, on my word I do, I always have. Won't you give me a chance? Just let me try and see if I can't make you happy?"

The quick blood flew into Molly's cheeks and she pulled her hand away. This, then, was what her doubts and perplexities led her into. She was being disloyal to Chris and making Percy unhappy. It only showed how unsafe it was to get thinking about things. She felt a quick reaction to her old allegiance. She saw Chris as misunderstood by all save her. He was too fine a nature for the rest of the world to appreciate. The ingenuous simplicity of Percy seemed clumsiness in comparison.

"Oh, Percy, how can you! You mustn't!" she stammered. "I'm awfully sorry. I never thought—I mean I'm awfully fond of you, of course, but not in that way." Molly was saying all the conventional things and became dimly aware of it, and aware, too,

that the genuine quality of Percy's feeling deserved something better. She put out her hand again and this time took his. She could think of nothing to say, but Percy's miserable young face made her feel very unhappy. Her lips trembled; she did the wisest thing she could have done to put an end to the situation and distract Percy from his own feelings. She burst into tears.

"Molly, my darling, don't cry," begged the distracted Percy, kneeling up in the sand and dabbing at her eyes with a khaki silk handkerchief she herself had given him. "Don't cry. What a brute I am! Forget it, dear, if it only makes you unhappier."

Soon Molly's sobs died down and she smiled wanly. "It's all right, Percy. I'm sorry to have been so silly, but I'm feeling upset to-day. I—I think we had better go back."

Percy got to his feet and helped her up; and then, still holding her hand as he stood looking at her for a minute:

"Molly, just promise me this," he urged. "If you should find you are not happy in your present engagement, you will tell me, won't you, and let me have my chance?"

"I'm afraid I'd sooner be unhappy with

Chris than happy with anyone else in the world."

"Still, promise me."

"If I do you mustn't count on it, Percy, will you? Because it's quite, quite impossible; it can't ever happen."

"All right, then," he said more gayly, "we'll leave it at that. If the impossible happens, as it often has before now, you'll tell me about it, honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun," promised Molly. "Now I must go home."

But Percy still kept hold of her hand. "I say, Molly," he begged. "Won't you? just one—you never have."

But in Molly's eyes a kiss was still a supremely important thing. "Oh, Percy, how can you? It wouldn't be right. Nobody ever has except Chris."

"It wouldn't hurt him, and it wouldn't hurt you, and it would do me no end of good, it would, really. Ever such a little one, Molly?"

Molly hesitated. She had always been proud of the fact that until the coming of Chris she had never allowed anyone to kiss her. Yet she was oddly conscious now of the fact that her refusal, instead of sounding

noble, seemed rather selfish. She looked appraisingly at Percy, at his eager, anxious face and his nice blue eyes, and it was not entirely unselfishness which prompted the sudden uplifting of her cheek toward him.

All the way home she felt rather wicked, but pleasurably aware of the fact that even if Chris were flirting with Mrs. Lee, she herself had not been entirely faithful either. She wondered whether Chris would mind if he knew, and hoped he would, but truer instincts told her that he was much more likely to call her a blessed infant and say he was glad she had been able to do that much for poor old Pennicuik. It was probably this instinct rather than any new-found wisdom which made Molly eventually decide to keep the affair to herself.

CHAPTER IV

As MAY be seen, Mr. Brent counted as something of a mystery in a household where everything seemed ordinary and open as it did at Wave Crest. Yet his history, if he could be said to have one, was nothing out of the way, except that it reflected far more credit on him than he would have admitted even to his intimates. No one at Wave Crest was an intimate of Christopher Brent, with the rather notable exception of Mrs. Lee—and this although he was supposed only now to have made her acquaintance.

Deception such as this, especially when practiced before a young and, hitherto, trusting fiancée, sounds as though there may be something reprehensible to conceal. Nothing could have been further from the truth in the case of Christopher and Miriam. They were both of that rare race which holds work, and the idea behind it, to be of more value than anything personal. They had first met when Brent was taking a well-earned holiday big-game hunting in Rhodesia, having

just brought to a successful conclusion the very delicate mission with which he had been intrusted. Up till then he had been a not particularly shining ornament of the Diplomatic Service. He came of a reasonably old though untitled Irish family, which perhaps was why, although a younger son, he was not in the proverbially penniless condition of his kind.

His real genius seemed to be for private theatricals, and this it was which gave a certain very great man—who was really extraordinarily intelligent for a member of the Intelligence Department—the idea that Mr. Brent could be of some use to him. That idea had been fully justified, and though no longer a popular figure in Embassy drawing-rooms, yet this apparently useless and futile young man was now considered one of the most brilliant members of the Secret Service. Older men at the game were wont to say of him that he trusted too much to instinct and not enough to reason, but even they admitted that he had a wonderful *flair* which, up till now, had never failed him.

As to Miriam, his connection with her was of the simplest. A letter of introduction from a friend had landed him at her hus-

band's farm in Rhodesia. Roderick Lee was a remittance-man of the worst type. He did all the obvious things, that is, drank, gambled, and knocked his wife about. Brent, who had a genuine talent for friendship, pitied the lonely intelligence stranded in the wilds as much as he did the ill-used feminine; and it was on a loan from him that Miriam Lee began life for herself as secretary to a member of the South African Government. Later still, in a case where a woman of charm was necessary, Brent recommended her to the authorities as his collaborator, since when she had been associated with him several times. And if her feeling for him went ever so little deeper than his for her, when do these things ever swing quite level? At any rate, both were filled with genuine satisfaction at working together once again, and even Molly's deflection with Percy only left Brent freer for the matter in hand.

As the morning wore on, a slight haze came over the brightness. Nothing approaching mist, but rather that fine grayish blight which sometimes overcasts a fine autumn day, and behind which the sun seems to be holding its breath.

Molly had not yet come back; Mr. Pollock

was playing golf with another like unto himself whom he had picked up at the Club-house. Miss Myrtle was in her room writing letters, a pursuit which she always referred to as "my correspondence" and which she had indulged until it had become a habit. Like most unattached people, she felt she had to expend a great deal of energy in what she called "keeping up with her friends."

Mrs. Sanderson had gone to the station to change a library book and meet her son, who was coming down for the week-end. Only Fräulein knitted with the quiet persistency of a *tricoteuse* in the French Revolution, and Fritz, the Dutch waiter, conversed with her as he went in and out in the course of his work. The red-brick gabled house (the country round Eastermouth was of the "residential" type, where red bricks abound) glowed in the clear sunlight, and the lawn and clustering trees looked almost painfully green by contrast. A little distance from the house itself showed the annex, where the maid-servants slept. Everything was very quiet. Mr. Brent and Mrs. Lee—whom he had presumably met for the first time the night before, and yet whom he had addressed as Miriam—were amusing themselves by half-

hearted attempts to shoot sparrows. From a little distance they looked exceedingly purposeless, not to say lazy, and even the expressions of their faces partook of their general casual aspect. But if anyone had been near enough to overhear even so much as the tones of their voices, he would have been struck by the incongruous yet unmistakable note of purpose. If he had been nearer still and could have heard the actual words, the mystery might gradually have revealed itself to him.

"So that's all I have been doing with myself," said Mrs. Lee, finishing a somewhat desultory account she had been giving of her movements. "I don't go in for a personal life of my own any longer, you know, Kit. It's just friendships and work for me. I have had enough of the other kind of thing."

"Poor old girl," said Brent a trifle absently. "And the work? The authorities haven't sent you down here for nothing. Have you got the particulars I wired you for?"

"Yes, in my dress. I can't get at them now, not being a heroine of melodrama."

"Later on will do. By the way, didn't my

man meet you at the station and give you something to bring down for me?"

"Oh, yes, a book. It's still locked up in my suit-case."

"That's all right," said Brent. "Now I'll tell you what I have done."

"The personal or the impersonal first?" asked Mrs. Lee with a faint smile.

"Oh, well, as to that," began Brent, "I suppose you can see for yourself."

"You're engaged?"

"Not officially, because, between ourselves, my present *rôle* of self-sufficient ass doesn't endear me to the old man. Molly knows, and I know, and that's all that matters."

"Give me a cigarette, Kit," said Mrs. Lee. "Thanks. Have you realized how difficult it's going to be? She's beginning to feel the strain already, you see."

"I do see. A blind man could have seen with his eyes shut, but it can't be helped. I must just hope to pull her through all right until the time comes when I can tell her."

"It isn't only your work, you see," continued Mrs. Lee, puffing at her cigarette, "though even about that there could be two opinions. Some people are idiots enough to

consider it underhand. But apart from your work, have you realized that you are a man who has led a very varied life? You have a whole store of experience and different kinds of knowledge, while Molly is the typical English girl, bred up in absolute ignorance and with entirely false values about life. First she'll be puzzled, then when she begins to understand she'll be shocked, then she may or may not dislike you. At present Molly thinks the whole world is made on a pattern. Good people and bad people. You are a good person because she loves you. She thinks of love as a nice thing that happens to everyone and which has its logical outcome in marriage and a house of your own."

"Hang it all, Miriam," protested Brent. "I know my world, of course—I should be an idiot if I didn't after knocking about so much—but I have always run straight as these things go, and there's nothing I need feel ashamed of telling to anyone who understands."

"Oh, I know that, Kit," said Mrs. Lee quickly, laying her hand for a second on his wrist and drawing it back again. "Heavens, you know how grateful I am to you and how fond. That's just what makes me nervous.

I can't bear to think of you being made miserable."

"And you say Molly is one of the people who doesn't understand because she doesn't know anything. . . . That's just why I love her," explained Brent. "It's a sort of vicious circle really. I love her for not knowing anything about life and I am going to teach her about it. I suppose that's really the interesting thing about what would otherwise seem a very ordinary engagement. I can't imagine myself ever leaving off loving Molly, but I do wonder what she'll be like when things happen that will make her grow."

"Nothing ever may happen," said Mrs. Lee. "Englishwomen have a most remarkable faculty of becoming wives and mothers and still floating on through life in bland ignorance."

"I don't think that would be the case with Molly," said Brent meditatively. "Of course, you only see her beauty and freshness and her conformity to type, but I have always had a feeling that Molly is an Undine and that she won't go through life without getting a soul; and we all know that means pain and grief and tears."

"That's true enough," agreed Miriam. "It's a curious thing, Kit, but I have often noticed that men who have seen a lot of life, and know the worst of it, generally love a woman for just what they would theoretically deprecate in her: for being ignorant and untouched. It's the woman of experience they like to talk to, but the raw material when it comes to marrying."

There was a faint thread of bitterness in her voice, but at the gleam of surprise in Brett's face she gave a very kindly laugh.

"Don't you worry, Kit," she said. "Your Molly is charming, anyway, and I believe if she is able to stick to you through misunderstandings you will find that her new soul will make her more charming still. Heartiest congratulations, old thing."

"Thanks," said Christopher briefly. "I say, Miriam, do you know anything about pigeons? Do you prefer them stewed or in a pie?"

Miriam stared at him. "My good child," she said, "what on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing, only pigeons form such a staple part of our diet here that it becomes

rather a vital question. Do you know anything about them?"

"A little; my brother used to show them when we were children. I was wrapped up in white mice myself, but I know he won quite a lot of cups."

"Well, what kind of pigeons are those over there on the lawn?" asked Brent casually.

"Oh, over there? All sorts. Mostly tumblers and one or two fantails."

"Surely there are a few carriers?" asked Brent.

Mrs. Lee looked again. "Yes, there is one over there, that darker colored one by himself. You can always tell a carrier by the white rim round his eye."

"I say, what an awful lot you know," said Brent; "white mice don't seem to have absorbed you to the exclusion of all else. You must give me some lessons in pigeonology, or whatever the word is. Do you think you could fetch one down with an air-gun?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Brent, running a loving hand up and down his air-gun as he spoke, "except, as you know, I am rather a crack shot with one myself. Funny thing,

but you would not think it if you were watching me from one of the windows of the house, would you?"

"I wouldn't, indeed," said Miriam, laughing. "I see what you are driving at, Kit—sorry to have been so dense. Hello, here's your Molly coming back alone. She must have abandoned the luckless Percy in the town."

Brent sprang to his feet. "I say, Miriam," he said, "you won't mind leaving us, will you? She left rather in a state, you know, and I want to kiss and make it up."

"I'll go indoors and think about pigeons," promised Miriam.

Molly was coming toward them over the lawn, a little paler than usual and with eyes that showed solemn from under the shady brim of her garden hat.

"Try and meet me in the sitting-room in about twenty minutes, Miriam," said Brent. "By the way," he added, laughing softly, as the girl drew nearer, "I don't mind telling you that my bath didn't run over by accident yesterday morning: I wanted to get into the Sandersons' private sitting-room. Sanderson's an Admiralty man, you know."

"Kit, you are a genius!" murmured Mir-

iam, with an amused smile. "Well, Miss Pollock, did you see the pretty soldiers?"

"Yes," said Molly, rather shyly; "oh, don't go in, Mrs. Lee."

"Must. I have actually not finished my unpacking yet. See you at lunch." And Mrs. Lee, who had mastered the art of graceful disappearance, seemed to evaporate toward the house.

Brent took a quick look at the girl's troubled face.

"Well—Undine," he said, taking her hand.

"Well, *what*?" asked Molly. Then with a quick flash of suspicion, "Is that Mrs. Lee's name?"

"Little ignoramus!" laughed Brent; "have you never even read about your prototype? Well, never mind, I want you to sit down and talk to me."

"I have been wanting to talk to you," said Molly, "but it seems very difficult, somehow. Oh, Chris, it was so hateful this morning! About the feathers, I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," said Brent carelessly. "I don't think it mattered much."

"That's just it," said Molly despairingly. "You don't think it matters. Father and everybody else does. I do."

Brent sat silently looking straight in front of him; his clean-shaven face, well-featured and tanned, but heavily lined for his thirty odd years, seemed to have had the foolish *insouciance* wiped out of it for a moment.

"Chris," went on Molly, suddenly softening, "you know I don't want you to go to the war. I think I'd go mad to imagine you in danger, but—but—the feeling's been growing up in me that perhaps there's something more important than just loving and being happy. Can't you do *something?* Something here at home, even if you can't go to the front? Oh, Chris, I am such a coward that I'll be glad if there really is some reason why you can't fight. But I do want to know what it is, and why you don't do anything over here. You see, it makes me so miserable not being able to stand up for you when father and people like Percy criticize you. Of course I say I know you have very good reasons and all that, but they don't believe me, because I can't tell them what they are."

"So you and Mr. Pennicuik have been talking me over, have you?" asked Brent.

"No," flashed Molly, "we haven't. At least Percy said nothing but what was nice

of you, but he said he wished for your own sake as well as mine that you would show these people that you are not such a——"

"Such a fool as I look?" asked Brent.

"You know you are not a fool," Molly defended him to himself. "It's only people who aren't clever enough to see how clever you are who think so."

"Like Mr. Pollock," suggested Brent blandly. He was feeling a little sore at the thought of having been discussed by Pennicuik and Molly.

Molly flushed a little resentfully. She was only nineteen and she had been brought up by Mr. Pollock to consider everything that he himself said was right and admirable. When she first got to know Christopher Brent she admired his monocle, his leanness, his slightly graying hair, the shape of his head and his square jaw. She admired, too, his casual, slightly *blasé* manner, which was yet so much more polished than the laborious politeness of Mr. Pollock's city friends. She knew Christopher had been in the diplomatic service, that he had traveled widely, that he was something of a mystery; and the glamor of these things was quite enough to make her fall in love with him as she under-

stood the term. Now, difficulties, suspicions, and disagreeables were accumulating touch on touch and she was bewildered and puzzled.

"How horrid of you to say that about father, Chris! You shouldn't say such things about him to me."

"No, I shouldn't and I am a brute, but apparently people may say what they like about me to you."

"I don't care what they say," countered Molly on a rush of enthusiasm. "I just love you and trust you through everything. But surely you can trust *me* a little more and tell me things? Somehow just now with Percy everything seemed so simple and straightforward. One knows all he is doing and thinking and feeling."

"Take care, Molly; you are developing your sex's instinct for absolute possession. And you can't possess a man wholly, my dear—not a man who is a man, at least."

Molly looked at him with troubled eyes. In her simple philosophy, love and possession were synonymous terms.

"I am frightfully sorry for you just now, Molly," Brent went on, "and I'd give the world to be able to tell you why I can't enlist. But I can't tell you, not even you. I will some

day—soon, I hope, but for the moment, like the Tar Baby, I must 'keep on sayin' nuffin'.' Trust me, do trust me, Molly. Trust me at least to the extent of believing that it isn't cowardice, or laziness, or apathy, that prevents me from enlisting. It's something I can't help."

Molly sat still a moment, thinking busily, and trying to evolve a theory that would fit the case. A terrible, yet not wholly unpleasant, because very romantic, idea took possession of her mind. Christopher was probably suffering from some frightful disease—appendicitis—decided Molly, and until he had been operated upon could not go to the front. Naturally he did not wish to distress her by telling her this. She, therefore, tried to play what she had read of somewhere as the "woman's part" and keep him cheerful.

"Chris, I *will* trust you," she said, rubbing her soft cheek against his sleeve. "I'm sorry if I have seemed not to, but everything has been so queer since yesterday. Since Mrs. Lee came," she added, thoughtfully.

She felt Brent start slightly against her caressing cheek.

"What's it got to do with her? Why drag her into it?" he said, a little irritably.

"I didn't. Why do you take me up like that?" asked Molly. "Chris"—facing round on the seat and looking indignantly at him—"you haven't been talking about it to Mrs. Lee?"

"Talking about what?"

"About why you can't enlist. You haven't told her the thing you won't tell me?"

"Of course I haven't, little goose. What on earth put such ideas into your head?" asked Brent, trying to speak naturally.

"Oh, nothing, only you seemed so very friendly with her. You played snooker with her all yesterday evening."

"But, my dear child, you said you had a headache and went to bed."

"And then you have been with her all this morning," continued Molly, taking no notice of this.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Brent, laughing, "considering you went off with young Pennicuik and abandoned me in the middle of the lawn."

"Father says," continued Molly, "that if he hadn't known you'd only met Mrs. Lee last night, he'd have thought you must have known her before. You seemed so very intimate, considering."

"Well, it's a funny thing," confided Brent, "but I find that I knew her husband years ago in South Africa."

"Oh," said Molly, staring at him, "when did you find that out?"

"This morning."

"When were you in South Africa?"

"Oh, about ten years ago now."

"What were you doing there?"

"Diamond prospecting, but we didn't find any. Do you want to dig up the secrets of my bad, black past, Molly? Let dead pasts lie, or they may be lied about."

"Chris!"

"Oh, I don't mean that I shall lie," said Brent hastily. "Men don't like to be questioned, Molly."

"So I see," said Molly, getting up. "I thought perfect love meant perfect confidence."

"So it does," said Brent. "It means having confidence in a person without being told anything about him. In fact, you might call love the confidence trick."

Molly had never heard of the confidence trick and would not have smiled if she had.

"Oh, well, suppose we have a game of tennis," she said, suggesting what was, to her,

the normal panacea for any strain that developed during the conversation.

"I'm frightfully sorry, Molly, but I can't just now. There are one or two things I must see to before lunch."

"Very well," said Molly, going toward the house. "Perhaps," she flung back over her shoulder, "Mrs. Lee might help you with them if you asked her. I dare say she will, even if you don't."

Brent stood looking after her, and swore softly but unmistakably, then he, too, went into the house, by way of the Sandersons' sitting-room.

CHAPTER V

THE sitting-room was empty, even Fräulein having taken herself and her knitting elsewhere. Brent glanced at his wrist-watch, and strolled up and down whistling softly, with rather a gloomy look on his face. Then he drew his inevitable pipe from his pocket and struck a light. At this moment, Fritz, a blond and cherubic-looking individual, came abruptly into the room.

"Excuse me, sair," said Fritz, catching sight of Brent, "but do you know where Mr. Pollock is? They demand him on the telephone."

"Mr. Pollock?" said Brent, lighting his pipe, "I don't know. He was playing golf; perhaps he's come in and is changing."

Brent finished lighting his pipe and flung the match in the grate, where it lay flickering on the neatly laid arrangement of wood and coal. He was startled by a sudden exclamation from Fritz, who rushed past him almost knocking into him, and snatching the match put it out.

"What the devil are you doing?" asked Brent.

Fritz stood breathing heavily, his florid face actually pale.

"Ach," he ejaculated, "that was a narrow sqveak."

"Fritz, pull yourself together. Vot vos a narrow sqveak?"

"The fire, sair," explained Fritz. "You nearly light him."

"But what if I did? It's nothing to write home about?"

"To—to write home about?" asked Fritz, staring at him, this time with what looked like terror in his face.

"To make a song about, if you prefer it," amended Brent. "I say, Fritz, you know you mustn't let yourself go like this. It's very bad form. It isn't done."

"But madame never permits this fire to be light," explained Fritz. "Madame, she scold me very much if he get lit."

"Blows you up, does she? I dare say you deserve it."

"Blows me up?" almost screamed Fritz.

"Oh, Lord!" said Brent, "I shall have to buy you a little book on English-Dutch idioms. What *I* want to know is this," with

a fatuous air of attempted cunning, "what I want to know is, what the dickens does Mrs. Sanderson have it laid for if she doesn't want it lit?"

"Ach, for that," said Fritz, shrugging his shoulders, "I cannot tell. She likes it so. But there is madame coming," he added, glancing out of the window over Brent's shoulder. "Perhaps she will tell you herself." And he walked out of the room, shutting the door after him.

Brent cast one puzzled look at the grate, then turned to greet Mrs. Sanderson, who came in at the window, followed by her son Charles. She was a fair, plump, pleasant-looking woman, slightly inclined to double-chin, with a figure kept rigorously elegant and set off by a smart but sober black satin suit. She carried a couple of library books under her arm.

"Ah, Mr. Brent," she exclaimed, "I don't think you have met my son before, have you? Charles, this is Mr. Brent; he has come down for the sea-bathing. He is a great friend of Mr. and Miss Pollock."

Charles Sanderson came forward and shook hands. He, like his mother, was fair and inclined to bigness, and either predispo-

sition or his work at the Admiralty had produced in him something of the unmistakable naval aspect—a clean, hard determination of look and a pleasant smile.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Brent," he said.

"So am I, to meet you, I mean," said Brent genially. "Down for long?"

"Only the week-end. We are most frightfully busy at the Admiralty, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course, you are at the Admiralty," said Brent gleefully. "I had forgotten you had a billet there."

"In the transport department," Mrs. Sanderson informed him with maternal pride.

She put the books neatly on a shelf as she spoke.

"Ah," exclaimed Brent, pointing his pipe at Charles, "then you are the very man I wanted to see. You can really tell us the truth about those Russians."

"Perhaps," said Charles Sanderson, laughing, "and—perhaps not."

"Well now, then," went on Brent confidentially and with a beaming smile, "perhaps I can tell you something. I have an aunt at Leamington, an awfully jolly old lady. She didn't see them herself, because,

as a matter of fact, she can't get out of her chair, but her parlormaid's young man works somewhere near the railway. Well, he has a pal who actually works *on* the railway, a very nice young fellow, Salvation Army and all that, teetotaler, too, I believe, and *he* told him that he had actually seen them—the Russians, I mean."

"That of course proves it," said Mrs. Sanderson, laughing, though not unkindly.

"What do you think?" persisted Brent to Charles.

"Shall I tell you the truth?"

"I wish you would; all these rumors are dashed worrying."

"Very well then, I will," said Charles, smiling broadly by now. "They didn't, not a solitary man jack of a Russian."

Brent's face fell. He stood looking the picture of disappointment. "Well, that is sickening," he said, "absolutely sickening. On the strength of the Salvation Army young man I had put five quid on it with a fellow at the club. This *is* a blow. It will be a blow for the old lady too. It's made her absolutely *It* at Leamington, being able to tell the story."

"Well, I must go and have a wash and

brush up," said Charles. "So long, Mr. Brent." He opened the door for his mother and they both passed out.

Left alone, Christopher Brent strolled over to the fireplace and began thoughtfully tapping it with his pipe. Up and down, all over, he tapped it; absurdly in the fashion of someone in a historical novel, who searches for a secret hiding-place. Suddenly a hollow sound rang from under his pipe. He tapped again to make sure. There was no doubt about it. He whistled softly, put his pipe in his pocket and taking out his match-box deliberately scattered its contents over the hearth. Then he knelt down, and producing from another pocket a little electric torch, directed its ray over the grate and up the chimney. A footstep sounded in the corridor, and slipping the lamp in his pocket again he began to take up the matches, humming a tune as he did so.

Mrs. Lee came softly into the room, and stood looking at his back for a moment.

"Whatever are you doing?" she said, as she closed the door.

"Spilt a box of matches—beastly nuisance," replied he, then glancing up, asked, "All alone?"

"Yes."

"Good." He swept the matches into the box and jumped up.

"What's the matter, Kit?"

"I think I'm on the verge of a discovery. But first, those papers."

She produced a small folded document from the little bag that dangled from her wrist and handed it to him. He ran his eye over it and gave a long whistle.

"By George, but this is interesting," he exclaimed. "So she's the widow of old General von Mantel, is she? Let me see, von Mantel was the fellow who wrote the book in defense of spies? Yes? I thought so. He always maintained that the end justified the means. Well, if it's his widow we're up against, she ought not to be any fool at the game."

"Don't suppose she is," observed Miriam.

"I wonder how she got hold of the late lamented Sanderson?" pursued Brent. "She's German herself, I suppose?"

"Very much so. She was born in Dresden."

"Well, well," remarked Brent, reading over the document again, "let's see when they were married—August '97. Then that

fellow Charles must be von Mantel's son and not Sanderson's at all. Curioser and curioser, as Alice would say. And what about the gentle Fritz?"

"We couldn't find out much about him," said Miriam. "He appears to be Dutch all right, and naturalized, but of course it's more than probable he's in their pay."

"H'm!" replied Brent, "and Fräulein Schroeder? She's in it, of course?"

"Oh, she's just one of a thousand," replied Miriam, shrugging her shoulders. "She's lived in this country for about twenty years, was governess to the Home Secretary's children, and in various other important families. Her references are excellent and so are her capabilities as a spy. She seems to be intrusted with most of their important work down here."

"And she so childlike, innocent, and bland," commented Brent. "Have you got that book for me my man gave you?"

"It's in this parcel. What is it, Kit?"

"It's a complete key," replied Brent, speaking quite casually, but in a very low voice, "to all the codes used by German spies and their various methods of communication. *Some* book, eh?"

"Kit, again I repeat that you are a genius! Where did you get hold of it?"

"Oh, that's a long yarn," answered Brent, spinning on his heel and strolling toward the mantelpiece once more. "But I don't mind telling you the Kaiser's Intelligence Department didn't actually make me a present of it. And now, Watson—though it's very rude to class you as Watson—to pursue my investigations."

He knelt and again began tapping the fireplace.

"Keep an eye on the window and an ear on the door, Miriam. By the way, didn't it strike you last night that Mrs. Sanderson refused the Myrtle's request for a fire in a very emphatic manner?"

"I didn't notice it at the time, but now you mention it——"

"Just so. Well, I didn't think much about it at the time, but one or two things have set me thinking since. Listen to this, Miriam." He tapped the solid-sounding tiles, then the one which rang hollow. "Like a bally melodrama," he commented. "It's a great game and all that, but it makes you feel such an ass, crawling round looking for secret springs and talking about dispatches and

things. I can never get over the curious feeling of unreality about them, just because one's so used to them in books. That's how everyone in England feels about that sort of thing, I imagine, and the Germans were clever enough to take that into account when they used all the tricks of the trade. Englishmen have always laughed at the idea of spies and called it melodramatic nonsense. And now it's been proved real everyone has the same sort of feeling as though a fairy story had come true."

All the time this chatter was flowing on, Brent's fingers were exploring, and now they found what they sought. A slight pressure and the whole of the grate revolved slowly round on a centre pivot, disclosing on what had been the inner side a curious and complicated-looking arrangement of metal, wood, and wires. Quite unintelligible it would have looked to the ignorant, but both Miriam Lee and Christopher Brent seemed to understand by their sudden exclamation and quickened look what hidden forces the gleaming, curiously sinister-looking machine actually stood for.

CHAPTER VI

"I KNEW that flag-pole wasn't there for nothing," was Brent's first remark.

Miriam was puzzled by this.

"Flag-pole?"

"Yes, right by the chimney-stack. That's how they work their aerials. Neat little wireless this, isn't it? I say, Miriam, if I could only intercept a message!"

"It may be working," said Miriam eagerly; "try it. A secret installation like this isn't likely to be in tune with more than one other instrument, so you ought to get something worth having."

Brent fixed the receiver to his ears as he knelt down on the hearth-rug. "Open that book you brought me," he commanded, "we shall need it. By George, it's working! somebody keeps calling. Hunt through the book and tell me how to signal him to go on."

"What's he calling?"

"Two dots, pause, and three dots very quickly. Look anywhere. Try No. 7."

Miriam whipped the pages over hastily. "No, that's not it," she announced. "I'll

try No. 9. That's got him, Kit. You said two dots, pause, and then three dots quickly, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"The answer is two dashes, pause, two dots."

"Right oh," said Brent, tapping it out.

Then, as the sibilant sound of the wireless began again, he hastily took down the message in his note-book.

"Dash, dot, four dots again and dash," he read out. "Does that make sense?"

"Yes, that makes the German word 'Morgen.'"

The hissing sound went on and Brent wrote in silence. When he had left off he still remained listening for a minute.

"It's stopped," he said at last, tossing the note-book to Miriam. "There, what do you make of that?"

"You had better signal him to hold," counseled Miriam. "Dot, pause, two dots."

Brent gave the signal while Miriam translated the message as quickly as she could and then read it aloud:

"Leith angelangt heute morgen—zug aufsteigen heute nacht—sofort weiter—Uzz wartet auf signal—was für Befehl?"

Brent listened with an expression of comic bewilderment on his face. "That is literally double Dutch to me," he remarked. "What is it in common or garden English?"

"Well, nothing intelligible on the face of it."

"Give it to me."

"Landed Leith this morning," Miriam read out. "Entrain to-night, crossing immediately. Uzz awaits signal. What orders?"

"Ye gods and little fishes," said Brent, slowly and with emphasis. "Then they really are coming after all!"

"Who are?"

"The famous troops from the north we have heard so much about. What the dickens shall I reply? Do give me an idea."

Miriam laughed. "A dot, a dash, two dots," she told him.

"What does that mean?"

"Well, in low German—very low German—it means 'Run away and play.'"

"That'll do for the present," said Brent, and tapped the message out accordingly. Then, still sitting on his heels, he looked at the wireless instrument thoughtfully. "It seems a shame to hurt this nice little fellow,"

he said, "and after it's been so useful and obliging, too. But then, it might oblige the enemy as well. So here goes." And leaning forward, he quickly but firmly proceeded to put the detector out of action. "There, I've spiked their gun," he announced and pressed the spring. In another moment the fireplace had resumed its usual innocent aspect.

Brent stood up and brushed the slight dust-marks off the knees of his white flannel trousers.

"Uzz," he murmured, "Uzz. What in the name of all that's wonderful does Uzz stand for? The rest of it's clear enough."

"They're going to try and stop the transports crossing, I suppose."

"I think that's their little game—Uzz"—he rumpled his usually sleek hair—"Uzz, Uzz, Uzz," he said viciously, "you're sure you got that down right, Miriam?"

"Sure," she replied confidently. "Look here's what you put down and here's the translation—Uzz."

"Well, the only thing I can understand at present," said Brent, "is that Uzz, whoever he may be, awaits a message. Hullo, isn't that voices, Miriam?"

"Yes, from the garden. Sandersons, I think."

"This is our way, then," said Brent, opening the door and whisking himself and Miriam out of it.

Not a trace of their presence or their work there remained, not even the traditional dropped note-book, when Mrs. Sanderson, that somewhat disingenuous widow, and her son Charles came into the room through the French window, talking placidly about nothing in particular until they saw that no one was there, when their tones suddenly changed.

"Thank goodness, that particular idiot, Brent, has gone," remarked Charles.

"Sometimes," replied Mrs. Sanderson acutely, "it seems to me there is danger in the very fact of his being such an idiot. You know they say there is a special providence which protects children, drunken men, and fools. It would be the real English good luck if Brent were to stumble on something which a cleverer man would never find; it is so much easier to defend one's self against clever men."

"I don't think we need worry about him," rejoined her son. "He wouldn't even under-

stand what a carrier pigeon was for if it flew up under his nose. Neither would that young Pennicuik you introduced me to coming from the station, though he's a very different type in other respects. A little while ago I don't suppose he knew one end of a rifle from another, and in a few months more if nothing happens to prevent it, he will be fighting with the best of them. They have no science, these English, but they certainly have a wonderful spirit. Do you know, mother, it's sometimes quite an effort for me to remember that I am a German. The English ideal certainly has a genius for absorption."

"My son! Do not say such terrible things, even in jest. You are a German and some day you will be a great German like your father before you."

"Perhaps," agreed Charles rather moodily, "but it isn't always as simple as you think to see exactly where one's duty lies. However, a German I am, as you say, and so the Fatherland must be my first consideration. Did Fritz get all the dispatches through?"

"Yes, all of them; the fishing fleet took them."

"Good," replied Charles, his voice now dry, brisk, and business-like. "And how many of the Potsdam carriers are left?"

"Two. One of them has hurt its wing, so the other must not be used excepting on a matter of the first importance."

A satisfied smile touched lightly at Charles's usually stern mouth. "Would you call a map of the English mine-field of the first importance?" he asked.

Mrs. Sanderson gazed at him for a second, hardly daring to believe her ears. Then a light of enthusiasm that seemed to transfigure her comely but commonplace face kindled in her eyes.

"My son, do you mean it? However did you get it?"

"Very simply. Stayed in one lunch-time and traced it. There you are." He produced his pocket-book and taking from it a thin sheet of folded paper, handed it to his mother, who undid a few buttons of her tight black satin bodice and thrust the precious paper within.

Then with something almost ceremonial in her action, she took her son's head between her hands—they were nearly of a height—and kissed him on the forehead. "You have

done a great thing for the Fatherland," she said solemnly, "and our Imperial master will not forget you. . . . And now tell me, what about these troops from the north; that is a vital question to which we must bend all our energies. Are they going through?"

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "I can't quite tell. My department hasn't touched them, but from what I can make out, there seems very little doubt they are on the way."

"But, Charles, they are relying on us for confirmation. What are we to do?"

Charles looked at his watch. "Well, I have left instructions with Gluckmann that he is to let us have a message here between twelve and one this morning. He may be calling now. Is the coast quite clear?"

"Quite, I think, but we will ask Fritz. Just ring the bell, will you, Charles?"

Charles obeyed and in a moment Fritz answered the summons. When he saw that the Sandersons were alone in the room his expression changed, and closing the door carefully he came right up to them.

"Fritz, is everybody out?" asked Mrs. Sanderson.

"Everybody. Meestaire Pollock, he was in at the telephone, but he has just gone out to

buy a paper and I saw Mr. Brent go with him. Miss Myrtle, she is in her room, and Mrs. Lee and Miss Pollock, they are in their rooms."

"Good," replied Charles. "Hang about in the passage and keep your eyes open, Fritz. We're going to use the wireless. Mother, you stand by the window."

When Fritz had left the room, and Mrs. Sanderson had taken up her post, Charles crossed over to the fireplace and pressing the spring brought the Marconi installation revolving round towards the room. He placed the receiver to his ears and picked up the key. Silence rewarded him.

"Funny that he isn't calling," muttered Charles, glancing at his watch again. "I will try signaling him." He tapped out a call and waited again. "What the devil can be the matter? The thing can't be out of order. . . ." He bent down to examine it and caught sight of the damaged detector. "Damnation! Somebody's been tampering with it. Mother, look here."

Mrs. Sanderson hastened across the room, her black satin dress creaking and rustling, her face flushed with agitation.

"Impossible, impossible!" she cried. "No one can have got at it."

"What's the good of saying it's impossible?" said Charles impatiently. "I tell you the detector's smashed to pieces. Look here."

Mrs. Sanderson made a violent effort to control herself, though her hands were trembling.

"It was all right last night," she said. "I got your message."

"Then it's been done this morning," said Charles. "Who's been in here? That's the question, mother."

"Everybody. I couldn't help it, thanks to the accident to the lounge. Everyone expected to come in here and I thought it would look suspicious if I refused, and I thought there would probably be safety in numbers.

"Ring for Fritz," said Charles shortly. He swung the grate back to its normal position and, unlocking the door, took up his position slightly to one side of it.

Fritz had hardly crossed the threshold before Sanderson had taken him firmly by the ear. His fingers nipped sharply, and Fritz, with an expression of bewilderment and alarm on his rotund countenance, sidled obediently forward.

"Now, Fritz," said Charles, speaking very

low, but with suppressed passion, "I want you to understand that if you lie you are done for."

"Mr. Charles, Mr. Charles," expostulated Fritz. "I not understand. Lie! For what should I lie?"

"Who's been tampering with the Marconi instrument? It's broken."

A horror that was not entirely due to his position at the moment dawned in Fritz's eyes.

"The Marconi! Broke? Sair, what do you say there? Who done it?"

"That's just what I am asking you."

"But, sair, how can I tell?"

"You lie," said Charles, his fingers slipping from Fritz's ear to his throat.

"I svear I do not know," gasped Fritz.

"My son, be careful," begged Mrs. Sanderson.

Fritz's face had become discolored, his eyes seemed to bulge.

"By our Imperial master, I svear," he managed to gasp out.

Sanderson's fingers relaxed and he let Fritz stagger away from him toward the couch.

"Then, who is the spy?" he said roughly.

"Of course it must be someone in the house."

"Mistair Brent," said Fritz feebly as he rearranged his disordered collar. "He was in this room alone a little while ago and he threw a lighted match on the fire. I see him, I tell you, sair; with mine own hands I put it out."

"Pooh! that eye-glassed idiot," said Charles impatiently. "Mother, think; surely you must have some idea."

"Young Pennicuik?" said Mrs. Sanderson thoughtfully. "No, if he did hear of such a thing he could never have concealed his suspicions so well. I know that type."

"Ach!" cried Fritz suddenly. "You are right, it is not Brent, nor this Pennicuik. It is Mistair Pollock. I see it all now."

"Mr. Pollock!" exclaimed Mrs. Sanderson. "How perfectly absurd! Why, he hasn't the brains either."

"My dear mother," said Charles, a little impatiently. "To judge by appearances nobody in this house has the brains. Yet somebody must have. It isn't much good to go by appearances. What makes you suspect Pollock, Fritz?"

"Just now he was rung up on de telephone," explained Fritz. "I listened and I

hear him talk about spies. He say Marconi and wireless, he talk a lot about spies."

"He always does," objected Mrs. Sanderson. "I hardly think he'd have done it so publicly over the telephone if there were anything in it."

"If Pollock's clever enough to have discovered this thing, he's clever enough to do that," muttered Charles, "but I can't say I think it very likely. You and Fritz must watch carefully all day, mother. I must go up to town at once, confound it. Don't forget, mother, I'll wire you. As soon as I get the information I'll wire 'yes' or 'no,' and if 'yes' you will know how to act."

"De carrier?" asked Fritz.

"No, no, that's wanted for the map I have given Mrs. Sanderson. Besides, it's too late now. It will have to be the emergency."

A little smile of satisfaction flitted over Fritz's face. Mrs. Sanderson put out one plump hand involuntarily as though warding something off.

"Is it really necessary, my son? And at such short notice?"

"Of course it's necessary. You needn't worry about the damage. You will be well recompensed."

"What must be done shall be done," replied Mrs. Sanderson. A thrill in her voice made her usually careful tones sound guttural. "Who gets the signal, my son?"

Charles Sanderson, his hand already on the door, paused to answer her.

"Submarine U11, standing out to sea," he answered. "Hullo, I hear everyone coming back. We are only just through in time."

He stood back to allow of the entry of Mr. Pollock and Brent. Mr. Pollock's face was red and his expression disapproving. Brent was obviously very excited.

"I say, Sanderson," he cried, "have you seen the mid-day paper?"

"Mid-day paper?" said Charles, wheeling round on him. "Why, what?"

"Perfectly awful news," declared Brent.

"Not a German victory?" demanded Mrs. Sanderson.

"Oh, no, but almost as bad."

"From Russia?" asked Charles, even his unperturbed voice showing restrained anxiety.

"Lord, no—from Doncaster. Would you believe it, they have scratched Baby Boy for the St. Leger and only yesterday I backed him for a tenner each way. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

In most English households life revolves round meal times. The day is marked out into "before lunch" and "after lunch," "before tea" and "after tea," and so on. Mrs. Sanderson was well aware of this and was also aware that next to dinner, tea was the sacred hour of the day. It was quite certain that at that time all her boarders would be congregated together to enjoy the really solid meal with which she kept them occupied at that hour. This feast was the only one which Mrs. Sanderson did not grace with her presence, and Fräulein had never sufficiently fallen into English ways to accustom herself to it either. Therefore, it was without any of the restraint engendered by a hostess or by one of a different nationality that the guests at Wave Crest took their tea. On this particular afternoon they were all assembled on the veranda, for the warmth of early autumn still held in spite of the clouding over. Percival Pennicuik, who, since the morning, had attained a uniform, was the guest of honor. He sat beside Molly and

Miss Myrtle, a position which was not an unmixed blessing. Mr. Pollock, needless to remark, had taken charge of the cake tables—and had secured Mrs. Lee for his right hand.

Fritz was bustling round with supplies of hot toast, thin bread-and-butter, shrimps and jam. Indeed, he bustled too much about Mr. Pollock for that gentleman's liking. It seemed to him to-day that he could never look up without finding Fritz at his elbow.

Brent was sitting on the other side of Mrs. Lee, opposite to Molly, which was the latter's arrangement. She had been trying to be broad-minded that afternoon by playing tennis with Mrs. Lee, and she was now continuing the good work, not altogether unbiased by the fact that Pennicuik was beside her. A little low-toned conversation with him might make Chris jealous, which she could not help feeling would be a good thing. Being a true woman, she never bothered about the effect on Pennicuik at all.

"Well," said Mr. Pollock breezily, as he piled jam on his third slice of buttered toast, "I must say Mrs. Sanderson does us uncommonly well. This toast would taste like nectar or elysium or whatever they call it to the Germans, I suppose. Poor beggars! I

have it on the *best* authority—though I'm not at liberty to disclose from whom—that they have finished their last horse already. And now they have got to live almost entirely on cats and dogs. A man who isn't a narrow-minded bigot can't help feeling sorry for the poor fellows. For the rank and file, that is. They have been misled by their superiors. Still, they are awful brutes most of them and deserve what they get," and Mr. Pollock spread his jam with a liberal hand.

"I hear," remarked Miss Myrtle, in her thin, reedy voice, and with a malicious glance towards Mr. Brent, "that Miss Kidlington was most successful with her white feather campaign this morning."

"I disapprove entirely of such methods," boomed Mr. Pollock. "If a man cannot or will not hear his country's call, he must either be able to give a reasonable excuse to his friends or be prepared to sacrifice their esteem." He spoke with raised voice and obvious intention. "Impertinent young women have no right to force such explanations by employing emblems of cowardice."

"I have often wondered," piped Miss Myrtle, "how the white feather came by its significance."

"You had better ask Mr. Brent," replied Mr. Pollock grimly.

Molly, who was not so absorbed with her conversation with Percy as not to hear what was going on, gave a low-toned, reproachful "Father!" Mr. Pollock only grunted.

"I'd tell you like a shot if I could, Miss Myrtle," said Brent politely. "But I haven't the foggiest idea. I never was any good at history, but I have a vague notion that it is connected with the Black Prince, who wore one in his helmet and said something about his white plume shining."

"What utter nonsense, Mr. Brent," replied the Myrtle, who had been a governess in her day. "Black Prince indeed! Or Henry of Navarre for that matter either, though I suppose it's he you are thinking of. They were both very brave men. It can have no connection with *them.*"

"Don't think I'm sticking myself up as an authority," put in Mrs. Lee pleasantly, "but as a matter of fact I think I can tell you. I came across the explanation the other day."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Pollock, all politeness.

"Yes, it dates from the time when cock-fighting was a fashionable sport. A white feather is never seen in a pedigree game

cock. Its presence indicates a bird of baser breed."

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Pollock. "Most interesting, I'm sure."

"And," continued Mrs. Lee, still more sweetly, "even to-day you will find that the cock with the most arrogant strut and loudest crow has generally a white feather in its tail. Oh, by the way, Mr. Pollock, didn't you get one this morning?"

"Get what?" asked Mr. Pollock. "I don't understand."

"A white feather."

"Me, me!" Between toast and indignation, Mr. Pollock positively spluttered. "Certainly not. Even Miss Kidlington has sufficient remnants of good taste left to respect my years."

"Your years, Mr. Pollock?" cried Mrs. Lee. "But why should she know what they are? Nothing would be easier than for you to conceal them."

"You flatter me, I'm sure," said Mr. Pollock, but looking far from pleased.

"No, no, not at all," persisted Miriam. "I didn't mean it that way. But heaps of men with a fine youthful constitution like yours have managed to mislay their birth cer-

tificates in a spirit of patriotic enthusiasm."

Everyone else had stopped talking and was listening to this little altercation conducted with such apparent politeness. Molly's face was flushed; she did not know whether to be grateful to Mrs. Lee for diverting attention from Chris or to be angry with her for baiting Mr. Pollock. Her personal distrust of Mrs. Lee supplying the balance, she decided on the latter course.

Mr. Pollock pulled himself together. "My dear Mrs. Lee," he began, "there is nobody, I assure you, nobody who would offer himself to his country more readily than I should if it were only possible. But unfortunately I have great responsibilities of a private nature which even if, as you so kindly imply, I could pass for a younger man than I am, would not permit me to—well, to risk my life on the battlefield."

"You are prepared to give me details of those responsibilities?" persisted Mrs. Lee.

"My dear madam!" began Mr. Pollock, genuinely indignant.

"Don't think me impertinent," said Miriam. "I didn't expect you would be able to tell me. I only just wanted to bring home to you the fact that there are quite a num-

ber of men, besides yourself, who have responsibilities which they cannot reveal to the world, but which are more than sufficient to justify them in staying at home." She spoke quietly, but with an almost passionate conviction which must have struck on her own ears, for she suddenly gave a little laugh. "Ah, well, we are being very serious over nothing at all," she said. "What have you been doing with yourself all this afternoon, Mr. Pennicuik? You are our chief source of interest, you know. I have been admiring your uniform all tea-time."

"Now you are making fun of me, Mrs. Lee," protested Pennicuik. "Though perhaps it doesn't look so bad when I'm sitting down. The coat's much too short. Must have been made for a much smaller chap than me. Still, it's better than nothing. I feel more business-like."

"It pokes horribly in the back," said Molly, tugging at it as she spoke and then giving little pats to try and make it set right over his chest and shoulders, a proceeding of which she hoped notice was taken through a certain eyeglass on the other side of the veranda.

"Walk away from me, Percy," commanded

Molly in the best dressmaker's manner, "and let me see the effect."

He obeyed, turning round at the end of the veranda, where a curtain of Virginia creeper, turned to flame, hung from the edge of the roof to the veranda-rail. Molly went after him and gave his coat a few more little settling tugs. Mr. Pollock watched them, well pleased, out of the corner of his eye.

Brent, apparently unperturbed, glanced through his eyeglass, and when Miriam rose and strolled on to the lawn, he went after her.

Mr. Pollock gazed at the backs of Brent and his companion, as they stood absorbed in a low-toned conversation, with growing indignation on his expressive countenance. He now rose, abandoning Miss Myrtle's conversation in mid-air, so to speak, and strode over to where his daughter and Percy were standing.

"Really, that fellow Brent has no sense of decency or shame whatever," he announced. "His brazen effrontery about the white feather at tea is nearly equaled by Mrs. Lee. Cross-questioning me like that indeed! and now look at 'em! Might have known each other for years! An outrageous flirtation, I call it."

"Chris found he knew her husband in South Africa," said Molly, trying to speak casually.

"Husband! I shouldn't be surprised——" began Mr. Pollock, and then turned off his sentence with a cough.

"I must say," said Percy hesitatingly, "it does seem odd, Brent not doing anything. Surely he could get some kind of a home billet if he doesn't want to enlist?"

"I'm sure Chris has very good reasons. I know he has. He told me," said Molly defiantly.

"Did he tell you what they were or only that he had 'em?" demanded Mr. Pollock, placing his finger-tips together in a judicial manner and gazing at her over the top of his pincenez.

"He said he couldn't tell me what they were."

"Exactly," said Mr. Pollock. "I suppose even Brent draws the line at admitting to you that he is a coward."

"Father!" cried Molly sharply.

"But it does look queer, you must see for yourself, Molly," urged Percy. "It's you we're thinking of, your father and I. It puts you in such a hateful position and you aren't

happy about it, you know you aren't, Molly."

"Oh, don't argue, Percy," flashed Molly irritably. "Mr. Brent has his own reasons for doing what he is doing. I don't know what they are, but I am quite satisfied by his assurance that they are good enough."

"Fiddlesticks!" said her father rudely. "If he has reasons they aren't good enough, or he could explain them."

"It does look like that," admitted Percy.

"Oh, you don't either of you understand," replied Molly, speaking low but very fast and with a heightened color in her cheeks. "You are just men and you want to judge everyone by yourselves. I don't judge at all. You reason about things, but I know them. I love Chris. Yes, I do, so there! I don't love him for being this or that, I just love him because he's himself, and even if he were entirely in the wrong in everything you say, I'd just go on loving him all the more," and Molly went swiftly along the veranda and in at the house door.

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated Mr. Pollock, "girls are damn funny things, Percy. Of course I understand Molly perfectly, she's my own child, but upon my word there are times when she almost puzzles me."

"I'm afraid one thing's clear enough," said Pennicuik a little drearily, "and that is that she's quite hopelessly in love with Brent and that nothing will get her out of it."

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied Mr. Pollock. "What does a girl of her age know about love? I have always been most careful that she should never know about anything. A pretty thing it would be if I can't influence my own daughter now. You know, Pennicuik, I used to hope that you and she——"

Percy shook his head. "So did I, but it's no go, sir. Molly won't look at anyone but Brent. She hasn't ever since she met him. And to-day she seems to have grown, or developed somehow. Don't know how to put it. But anyway I don't stand an earthly, less now than ever."

"You forget my influence and authority, my boy," said Mr. Pollock heartily. "I shall insist on it all being off between her and Brent. This flirtation with Mrs. Lee is the last straw, and then, well—there *is* such a thing as catching a person on the rebound, you know."

This did not sound at all the way in which Percy, who was young enough to be ideal-

istic, cared to win Molly, but Mr. Pollock's tone was so intensely confident that he could not help a faint gleam of hope darting into his mind.

"You are very good, sir—thanks awfully," he said, "but I don't want Molly made unhappy."

"You leave it to me, my boy," said Mr. Pollock; "tact and firmness, that's what is wanted, tact and firmness."

Meanwhile, Miriam and Brent were strolling idly about the lawn.

"I suppose the others are all in the sitting-room," remarked Miriam, glancing toward the French window which stood open at the further end of the veranda from the tea-party.

"Fräulein is still out," replied Brent, "busying herself with a sketch-book. By the way, Miriam," he went on, "as you know, I am like a woman in that I go much more by intuition and feeling than by reason. I told you that Fräulein always seemed to me the sinister spot in this house. It may seem absurd to you to say it, but I have a curious feeling that she, and not Sanderson or his mother or the excitable Fritz, is the leader here; they are all more or less fanatics, of

course, but Fritz gets well paid for what he does, and he is animated chiefly by hatred of the English. It is certainly the object of Mrs. Sanderson's life, to which she has trained Charles up. But with Fräulein it's more than that. It's her religion, her passion."

"She seems so normal," observed Miriam.

"That's because of her iron self-control," replied Brent. "But I should not be surprised if she turned out to be the type of religious maniac which is quite the most dangerous and ruthless thing in the world. Do you remember the case of Euphrasie Mercier?"

"No, who's she?" asked Miriam. "I don't delve into such curious subjects as you, you know, Kit."

"She was a notorious French murderess," replied Brent, "and though perfectly sane and responsible, a religious maniac. She was only devoted to her own family, who were all more or less congenial idiots, and she murdered quite ruthlessly for their benefit. Translate relations into terms of country, and I think you will find the same phenomenon in Fräulein Schroeder. She's not a type of her country, of course. One must not be

unfair enough to think that. It simply is that the authorities had the genius to see her type and make use of her."

"Kit, you positively make me go cold down my back. I shall have horrid visions to-night of Fräulein murdering us all in our beds."

Brent smiled and continued placidly: "Fritz, too, is of the criminal type, though without brains or the religious conviction which justifies Fräulein to herself, but you have only got to look at his thumbs to understand the type at once."

"His thumbs! Kit, you make me feel like a mere beginner who knows nothing. I have never noticed his thumbs."

"They are extraordinarily long," Brent told her, "reaching to the top joint of his first finger. Troppmann, who murdered the whole Kinck family, had thumbs like that, and so had several other more or less famous assassins."

A little shudder ran through Miriam, strong as her nerves were. The intrigue, the uncertainty all about her of which only she and Christopher were aware, the darkness in which of necessity they were groping, trusting very much to luck: all this, though in its way stimulating, yet every now and

then overcame her with a prescience of disaster. And now this cold, matter-of-fact talk about criminal types added to her sense of discomfort. She glanced up again at Brent and he gave an almost imperceptible but reassuring wink of his eye-lid.

"Don't you worry any," he advised; "we're going to come out on top all right."

"It seems to me sometimes," said Miriam hesitatingly, "that you trust too much to intuition and to luck. Wouldn't it be better just to have the whole household arrested now? We've got enough evidence."

"Not on your life," said Brent. "You forget about Uzz. He's got to be settled with too, and I don't mean to miss him if I can help it."

Fräulein was coming up through the garden, a little rusty brown figure, the black silk bag, in which she kept her knitting and other things, tucked under one arm, the inevitable umbrella under the other. She looked very insignificant, very quiet, very placid. She nodded in her dry little way to the assembled company as she went to the far end of the veranda and in through the French windows of the sitting-room, shutting them after her with true German precision.

CHAPTER VIII

In the sitting-room, Mrs. Sanderson was awaiting, with outward composure, Fräulein's return and the telegram from her son. She had not turned on the light, though the room, owing to the slope of the veranda roof outside, was already too dim for her to see to read, as her sight was not very good. But like every other woman in the household she was knitting—a comforter for Charles.

"Ah, you finished soon, Luise," she said as the little brown figure stepped into the room. "Have you got what you wanted?"

"Yes, I have been most lucky," replied Fräulein, looking down at her bag. "The light was good, all the English were at their tea, the cliffs were deserted; but one half-hour and my drawings were complete. Every detail of the harbor defenses."

"I congratulate you," said Mrs. Sanderson cordially.

"Dank Dir, Meine Kameradin."

"Ssh!" cautioned Mrs. Sanderson, "we must still be careful."

The little Fräulein shrugged her shoulders. "Ach!" she said, "the English have no ears, how then should their walls have them? I saw all your English at their tea. Had I brought the news that our admiral had landed on their shores, they would still have demanded a second cup before asking where he had landed." She began to pace quickly up and down the room, her eyes, usually so mild, gleaming from behind their gold-rimmed spectacles, her full brown skirts swinging with the energy of her movements. "They are fools, these English," she went on. "Fools and the sons of fools. They dwell in their fool's paradise and bitter shall be their awakening, for it is into our hands that the Lord has delivered them."

"It is good that we have been able to take a part in the great work for the Fatherland," replied Mrs. Sanderson, with deep sincerity but less vehemence than Fräulein.

"And a great part," cried Fräulein ecstatically. "Have you news from Charles yet?"

"Not yet. I expect a telegram from him any moment."

"And the spy, the traitor? Has Fritz discovered anything?"

"I will ring and ask him," said Mrs. San-

derson, crossing to the bell. "He did suspect Pollock, I know, an unlikely person it seems to me, but Charles said something about Brent, which seems to me more unlikely still."

"Ach, Brent, he seems an idiot and a coward. Even his own people despise him. All the same," replied Fräulein, "we must suspect everyone at present and I have a curious feeling about Brent. It seems to me almost at times as though something in me recognized something in him, and I say to myself, 'Young man, are you quite such a fool as you look?' And then I test him with something and watch him carefully and lo! he is even a worse fool than he looks. And since I prefer trusting to reason rather than to feelings which are quite irrational, I have come to the conclusion that my reason is probably right and that he is a fool. But all the same one must be careful. Ach, here is Fritz."

"Are they still at tea, Fritz?" asked Mrs. Sanderson.

"They are at last finishing," replied Fritz. "I have just taken them of toast the fourth time. Oh, dat it might shoke dem in de droat!"

"Business, business," said Fräulein tartly. "Have you discovered anything yet?"

"Nodings for sure, but I have mine eye fixed upon one man."

"Ah, Brent?" asked Fräulein quickly.

"No, Mistair Pollock, it is always Mistair Pollock I suspect. I leave him by himself not ever. I keep on thinking of what he talk on that telephone about German spies."

"You do well to watch him, Fritz," said Fräulein—it was curious how she took the lead in the presence of Mrs. Sanderson in that lady's own drawing-room—"for though I do not know that Mr. Pollock is clever enough to have found out anything, yet he has a bad and cruel face like a codfish. He is no man to trust. Come and tell us immediately you find out anything more, Fritz."

"What about the plan of the mine-field that Mr. Charles gave you?" said Mrs. Sanderson. "Has it gone?"

Fritz waved his arms with an enthusiastic gesture. "All is ready. I have the map rolled up, it is only to tie it round the leg of my last, my most peautiful pird, and then he will fly, faster than the train, straight to his beloved Germany."

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"And your drawings, Luise?" said Mrs. Sanderson, turning to her.

"It is necessary that I make tracings from them," explained Fräulein. "The originals are for the pleasure of my friends, you understand, they are works of art. The tracings are but an outline with my notes of strategical values. We must arrange about that later, but now"—as the sound of voices was heard drawing nearer along the veranda—"the Philistines are upon us."

Fritz went out while Mrs. Sanderson opened the French windows and with her pleasant smile asked everyone to come in.

Mr. Pollock stood aside with an elaborate air to allow Mrs. Lee and Miss Myrtle to pass. Then he too stepped pompously in over the raised sill with an action extraordinarily like that of a cock strutting across a farmyard. He was followed by Brent and Pennicuik, the former smiling foolishly and twirling his eyeglass.

"I say," he called out to Mrs. Sanderson, "Pennicuik has brought us great news. What do you think? Those famous troops from the north are coming through at last. Nice little surprise for the Germans, eh? Hullo! What the devil's that?"

"That" was the crash of a broken plate which Fritz had just been carrying along the veranda as he "cleared up."

"Careless beggar," said Mr. Pollock. "I don't know what's come over him, I'm sure—seems to be blundering about all day. Well, it's great news, isn't it, Mrs. Sanderson? I wonder your son didn't say anything about it this morning."

"A servant of the Admiralty," remarked Mrs. Sanderson primly, "is not permitted to reveal the secrets of his country even to his mother."

"Oh, it's got to be kept dark, of course," said Pennicuik. "I had it on jolly good authority, but I can't tell where I got it. If it's going to be a little surprise packet for the Germans we have got to lie jolly low about it. They've got their beastly spies all over the place. Oh, I beg your pardon, Fräulein Schroeder."

"Ah, Mr. Pennicuik," protested Fräulein, "it is not kind of you always to forget that I am English."

"My aunt at Leamington will be awfully pleased," commented Brent cheerfully. "Thousands of them, Pennicuik says."

"A hundred thousand have gone through

the country already," said Pennicuik, "and another hundred thousand are coming through to-night. That will tickle the blighters up a bit."

"I expect Charles will be able to tell us all about it when he comes down, as it's already got out," said Mrs. Sanderson. "That is, if he's able to get down. He's going to wire me."

"By the way," went on Pennicuik, "such a joke. I have got to go on guard on the cliff path to-night, just at the bottom of the garden here."

"All by yourself?" asked Fräulein.

"Oh, of course I shall be relieved. I get two hours on and four off. I start at six and go on till eight, then somebody else takes the job over and I don't come on again till twelve."

"Dear me, that seems most extraordinary waste of time," said Mr. Pollock; "what on earth is there for you to guard on the cliff path?"

"Heaven alone knows," replied the ingenuous Pennicuik. "I don't. But if you should feel like strolling along the top of the cliff after six, keep your eyes open and be ready to answer if I challenge you."

Molly slipped into the room in time to hear this last sentence. She was slightly pink about the eyelids, but she had powdered her little nose and seemed as usual.

"What's that you're saying, Percy?" she asked. "Are you talking about being on guard to-night? I think I shall come out and try to bribe you, but I shouldn't have the remotest notion what to do if you were to challenge me."

"Oh, I can tell you that," declared Brent. "He pops up from behind a pebble somewhere and says, 'Halt, who goes there?' Then if your tongue doesn't stick to the roof of your mouth with fright, you answer him as quickly as ever you can get it out, 'Friend.' Then he'll say, 'Advance one and give the countersign.' Then you mutter 'Jerusalem' or 'artichoke' or the first long word that comes into your head, and he says, 'Pass, friend, all's well.' That's right, isn't it, Pennicuik?"

"Good Lord, no," exploded Percy with a good-natured laugh. "All that's been washed out. South Africa taught us one or two better than that. As soon as I've said 'Halt,' I take cover and get ready to fire, and then I do fire, and that's all there is to it."

"Dear me," simpered the Myrtle, with a nervous giggle, "this does feel like war. I don't suppose the young couples on the cliff will like it, but how safe we shall all feel with Mr. Pennicuik at the bottom of the garden."

"I shall certainly go out and have a chat to cheer you up," declared Molly, by a strong effort refraining from glancing at Brent to see the effect of her speech.

"Afraid it's against the rules," said Pennicuik, "but between my times of being on duty I'll look in here for a whiskey-and-soda, if I may."

"Do, please, Mr. Pennicuik," said Mrs. Sanderson cordially, "you will find everything ready." She spoke quite placidly, though she heard Fritz coming down the passage and knew he was probably bringing the telegram. When she saw the orange missive lying on the salver, she opened it with tranquil fingers. "There is no answer, Fritz," she said after a moment. "My son is coming down," she announced to the rest of the room. "If you will excuse me, I will go and see the cook about the dinner."

"I must be off, too," said Pennicuik. "Got to get back to duty. Many thanks

about to-night, Mrs. Sanderson." He held the door open for her and went out in her wake.

"I wonder, dear Fräulein," asked Miss Myrtle, "whether you would be so very kind as to give me another of those admirable little pilules of yours for the digestion? I am still somewhat upset from the chill I contracted last night."

"But certainly, dear Miss Myrtle," replied Fräulein, opening her black satin bag and turning the contents upon the table. "Here you are."

"Hallo, a sketch-book!" remarked Brent, strolling over and picking it up before Fräulein could prevent him. Indeed, she forced herself to check the movement that would have betrayed her anxiety.

"Oh, you must let me look at it, you must really. I'm awfully keen on sketching. I'm a bit of an artist myself."

"But certainly, Mr. Brent," replied Fräulein.

And indeed, he was already turning over the pages.

"Though you will find nothing in my poor efforts to admire. These are simply souvenirs for my friends who have been down

here with me. I am going to what you call 'work up' a water-color from them for Mrs. Sanderson."

"By George! are you really though?" asked Brent. "That's a good idea. I had no idea you were such a topping good artist." He turned the pages till he found the view of the harbor she had been at work on that afternoon. "Hullo," he went on, "here's a little picture of the harbor. You know, that simply tickles me to death."

"Tickles you? I don't understand," replied Fräulein, looking steadily at him.

"I mean, it's so ripping good, you have got it absolutely to the life. But I say, what's that tree doing there?" And he pointed with his finger at an aggressively green little tree which adorned one corner of the sketch. "Isn't that where the fort is really?" he asked amiably.

"Ah, yes, but the fort it is so unbeautiful," replied Fräulein. "I claim an artist's license and I make it instead a tree."

"Oh, I see," exclaimed Brent. "And this flag-pole at the end of the pier?"

"The same idea, Mr. Brent. The light-house, it is so stiff and ugly, I put a flag, it is so much prettier."

"You have got the true artistic temperament, what?" asked Brent.

"I fear, Mr. Brent, that you what you call 'pull my leg,'" said Fräulein, with what for her was almost an approach to archness.

She took the book from him and snapped the elastic band round it once more.

"No, really, I assure you," said Brent earnestly. "I'm not playing the giddy goat. I don't know much about it, but I'm awfully keen on painting. I know what I like and all that, you know. I wonder, Fräulein, if you would give me a little sketch some time, just a little memento of a pleasant holiday and all that sort of thing?"

"I will not forget," said Fräulein graciously; "it will give me much pleasure. But now, if you will excuse me, I must go on with my water-color for Mrs. Sanderson, while the effect is still fresh in my memory."

Brent with his usual airy politeness opened the door for her. Mr. Pollock also stalked toward it.

"You needn't shut it, Brent," said he, "my daughter and I are both going out. Come, Molly, I wish you to go for a walk with me."

"Oh, father!" expostulated Molly. She

had thought that after tea she and Chris must really get a little time alone together.

"Come, Molly, I wish it," said her parent majestically.

"I'd go for a good long walk if I were you, Mr. Pollock," advised Brent cheerfully.

"Indeed, sir, and may I ask why?" said Mr. Pollock, fixing him with a cold stare.

"Your liver seems to want shaking up a bit," replied the young man innocently.

Mr. Pollock gave vent to that untranslatable sound which is always written "Pshaw!" and marched out of the room, followed by a reluctant Molly.

Brent gave her a smile and managed to meet her eyes, saying under his breath, "Later, dear," which sent her off a little reassured for the time being.

"Well, Kit," said Miriam, as soon as they were alone, "you have a nerve, I must say! Fancy picking up Fräulein's sketch-book under her very nose and looking at it!"

"Well, she's got a nerve, too," replied Brent. "She sat there and blinked at me like a barn-door owl. She didn't turn a feather."

"Did you learn anything from it?"

"Oh, it's no use to us. You see, we can't

prove anything. She's played the old dodge, stuck in trees instead of forts and flag-poles instead of lighthouses. Might be anywhere. What we want are the jolly little tracings she'll do, with notes and all sorts of interesting details. Meanwhile, Miriam, I have had one of my flashes of inspiration. I have thought of who, or rather what, Uzz is."

"Kit, what is it? Do tell me."

"Well, of course I ought really to have thought of it sooner. In nearly all codes, as you know, the same signs stand for letters and for numbers. A might be 1, B 2, C 3, and so on, or again they sometimes reverse it and make J 1 and A 0. Sometimes they work in a similar way from the opposite end of the alphabet, running from Q to Z or from Z to Q. In this case I think Z stands for 1. Now you understand."

"I don't," murmured Miriam. "U one one. . . ."

"Try U eleven."

"Kit! A submarine!"

"Exactly," agreed Brent airily. "A German submarine. And they intend to signal to it from here. I don't know how yet, but we shall soon find out. Anyway, I thought it worth while to wire the Admiralty and there

will be a couple of cruisers in the bay to-night."

"Did you warn the Admiralty about Charles Sanderson?" asked Miriam.

"Yes, his number's up all right. A couple of plain-clothes men will come down in the same train with him and later on they will give him the surprise of his life. I say, Miriam, we're going to have some fun."

"Well, what can I do, Kit?"

"Just at the moment you might give me a hand with this," answered Brent, taking from his pocket a coil of wire which had a small disc attached at either end and showing it to her. "This little fellow," he said, uncoiling it, "might be truly called the Eavesdropper's Friend. It's a sort of super-telephone. Here, you take hold of one end of it and I'll whisper into the other."

Miriam slipped the disc under the heavy folds of her reddish hair, and Brent spoke into the disc at the other end of the wire so quietly that though his lips moved no one not near to him could have heard what he was saying. Mrs. Lee, however, positively jumped.

"Heavens, Kit, it's nearly broken my ear-drum."

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said he contentedly. "This little affair will detect sounds almost indistinguishable to the naked ear and convey them quite clearly for a mile or more. Here goes," and he began to arrange the wire down the fibrous stem of a large palm which stood in a pot just inside the room beside the window, fixing the disc where the leaves began to branch out. Then he lifted up the edge of the carpet and ran the wire under it through the window, and repeated his performance with another palm on the veranda.

"There," he said, standing back. "I don't think anybody would spot that unless they looked with a magnifying glass. Little boys should be seen and not heard, I was told in my youth. Well, if necessary this little boy is going to hear and not be seen. Comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Kit, you really are wonderful. Wherever did you unearth that thing?"

"Hush," he breathed, in mock terror, "didn't you see what was on the box? 'Made in Germany.' . . . By the way, talking about German inventions, what about Fritz's little dickie-bird?"

"I've been keeping my eye on him," replied Miriam, "but he hasn't done anything

yet. However, I think I will take a stroll round now. You had better stay here, Kit, so that I can warn you in time."

"Right oh. I've got my little gun all right. It must be quite half an hour since I had a pipe. I'll sit down here like a little gentleman and have one. Good luck, Miriam."

Mrs. Lee's white figure glimmered across the lawn in the glow of the late sunlight, for the gray blight which had seemed to settle over the world all the afternoon had lifted, as it often does toward evening.

Christopher settled himself in the most comfortable armchair and proceeded to light up. He had hardly taken two puffs, however, before Mr. Pollock with a determined air marched into the room, his hat on his head and his walking-stick in his hand.

"Ah, you're still here, then, Brent! And alone for a wonder," he exclaimed. "It's very convenient, for I wish to speak to you at once."

CHAPTER IX

WHATEVER Mr. Brent's thoughts may have been, his face remained bland and unperturbed.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he said cheerfully. "But I thought you were going out for a walk?"

"I am taking my daughter out for a walk, sir," replied Mr. Pollock, "because I do not wish her to have any opportunity of remaining alone with you."

"You will have your work cut out if you are going to trot Molly round all the time, won't you?" observed Brent.

"You are pleased to be impertinent. What I have to say, Brent, is this: when I first knew you I was misguided enough to like you, sir."

"Oh, come, why misguided?" said Chris.

"Because I have been, though reluctantly, compelled to reverse my opinion. I consider, sir, that you are a coward and a shirker."

"Indeed. And Molly? Does she share your opinion?"

"My daughter is sentimental and foolish

like all girls of that age. At present I am sorry to say she doesn't see eye to eye with me in the matter, but she will, sir, she will. You understand what I mean."

"I don't know that I do, quite."

"Well, I will come to the point immediately," continued Mr. Pollock with some violence. "What I wish to find out from you is whether or not you are prepared to discontinue certain attentions which are no longer welcome, at any rate to myself."

"My attentions were not to you," Brent pointed out.

"I have other views for Molly," went on Mr. Pollock, scorning to notice the interruption. "Quite other views."

"Oh, what's his name?" asked Brent.

"It's no business of yours. As to you, sir, I repeat that you are a coward."

Brent polished his eyeglass, put it in his eye, and gazed meditatively out into the garden.

"Yes," he agreed, "Miss Kidlington settled that this morning, didn't she?"

"And you don't even attempt to deny it," exploded Mr. Pollock.

"Oh, I never contradict a lady."

Mr. Pollock tried a new tack. "In my posi-

tion as a Justice of the Peace," he began, "I have learned a great deal about human nature and I have always maintained that there is something good even in the worst of us." He looked at Brent as though to say, "There is still hope for you, incredible as it may appear."

"It's very broad-minded of you," said Brent.

"And if," Mr. Pollock went on with his argument, "and if you have any remnant of manhood left in you, if you wish to prove that you are not as base as you are weak, you will do the only thing possible under the circumstances."

"That being?" queried Brent.

"You will relinquish all claims to the affections of my daughter. I am not asking anything unreasonable of you. It isn't as though you were publicly engaged to her. Come, sir, your decision."

Brent was silent a moment, then: "My dear Mr. Pollock," he replied impressively, "you may rely on me to do the right thing."

This sounded well at first, but on thinking it over, Mr. Pollock was not satisfied.

"Um, yes, but what do you call the right thing?" he asked cautiously.

"And," continued Brent, as though following his own train of thought, "at the right time."

"Is that all you have to say, sir?" demanded Mr. Pollock indignantly.

"That is all, I believe. I really don't see the necessity for saying anything. I won't keep you any longer from your walk, Mr. Pollock." And Brent strolled toward the window as though he meant to leave the room.

Mr. Pollock stared, swallowed, and blew his nose unbelievingly. Then he settled his hat more firmly on his head, thrust his silk handkerchief, as he thought, into his coat-tail pocket, and departed, banging the door after him. His voice could be heard calling in the hall: "Molly, Molly, aren't you ready yet? What a time you girls always take. I have been waiting ten minutes."

Left alone, Brent peered anxiously out of the window and at the same moment Miriam came swiftly toward him.

"Fritz is just going to the pigeon-house," she said. "Don't shoot in a hurry. A carrier always circles round three times before it takes its direction."

There certainly was no appearance of hurry about Brent as he picked his air-gun

from the corner, even stopping to pick up Mr. Pollock's bandanna, which lay upon the floor where it had dropped when that indignant gentleman thought he was stuffing it into his pocket.

"You had better stay here," he said, "and try to prevent anyone coming into the garden for a minute or two. In fact, you simply *must* not let anyone pass."

"I won't. Have you got the dummy message I made for you?"

"Yes, here it is." He took a tiny little packet wrapped in waterproof silk from his pocket and slipped it back again. "So long," he said, and wandered with apparent aimlessness into the garden.

Miriam stood just inside the room, her ears open to any sound in the house, but her eyes and her mind intent on Christopher. At that moment the door opened and Molly, in a little sports coat and knitted cap of blue, ran into the room.

"Chris," she began, and then stopped short. "Oh, do you know where Chris is, Mrs. Lee? I've just got to go out with father and I wanted to see him for a moment first."

"Mr. Brent's just gone out," replied Mrs.

Lee, still standing in front of the window, but turning her back to it.

"Oh, well, not through the house or I should have seen him."

"I think he's gone on to the cliff."

"Then I'll run after him. I told father I'd catch him up on the road." And Molly went toward the window.

"I'm sure you won't catch him," said Mrs. Lee. "He was walking very fast."

"What can he have been going there for?" wondered Molly. "I'm sure I shall catch him, Mrs. Lee; you don't know how fast I can run." And she put out her hand to the latch.

"Miss Pollock," began Miriam, "don't go for a minute, there is something I particularly want to ask you."

"I can't stop now," said Molly, "or father will be furious. Won't this evening do?" She took a further step toward the window, but to her indignation Mrs. Lee did not move aside.

"Will you kindly let me pass?" she demanded. Molly had never spoken with such icy dignity in all her life before.

Miriam gave her one of her peculiarly charming smiles which not unnaturally at

such a moment served to irritate Molly still further.

"I know that my behavior must seem extraordinary to you," said Miriam, "but not even you must disturb Mr. Brent now . . ."

The sickening dread, the suspicion that all was not as he had told her, between Chris and Miriam, welled up in Molly's mind. It was a dread that, since her conversation with Chris that morning, she had been endeavoring to stifle. Now it would not be denied. Pain, bewilderment, and a pathetic look of helplessness showed in her face for all her attempt at pride.

"My dear Mrs. Lee," she said loftily, "I don't understand this mystery at all. One thing I do know, and that is that you are taking more on yourself than you have any right to do. Kindly let me pass."

"I can't," said Miriam.

Molly was young and strong and quick of eye and hand. She made a dart past Mrs. Lee, and with a quick jerk unlatched the window. As she did so, Fritz came quietly into the room by the door. Having for the moment lost sight of Mr. Pollock, he was once again searching for him.

"Why, there's Chris," exclaimed Molly,

straining her eyes across the lawn in the growing dimness. "Just strolling about with his air-gun. Oh, what's he doing? He's shot a pigeon!"

The next instant Fritz had rushed to the window, forgetting all sense of decorum, almost knocking the two women aside.

"What do you say?" he cried. "Vot vere you saying?"

"Oh, Fritz!" cried Molly, "how you startled me. I'm afraid Mr. Brent has shot one of your pigeons. He must have done it by accident."

"Ach, *mein Gott, mein Gott!*" Fritz dashed across the veranda, his face white as paper.

Molly stared after him. "I think Fritz is going off his head," she announced, forgetting for a moment her grievance against Mrs. Lee.

Miriam wrung her hands. "Oh, Miss Pollock, Miss Pollock," she cried, "why wouldn't you do as I asked you? When will you see that you don't understand everything?"

Molly flamed round at her. "I understand quite enough," she cried. "I understand that you and Chris——" she was interrupted

by Chris himself, who came running toward them.

He looked angrier than Molly had ever seen him and did not notice her presence.

"My dear Miriam, what on earth have you been up to?" he demanded. "I begged you not to let anyone pass. You knew how important it was and yet——" Here he caught sight of Molly. "What, you're here?" he exclaimed, for once losing his self-possession. "But I thought you had gone for a walk with your father. Why haven't you?"

"I—I—only came to say good-by to you first," replied Molly, her lips trembling uncontrollably, "and now I wish I hadn't. I think you are perfectly hateful." She burst into a passion of tears, and although her words had been childish there was a sound in her crying that no one who knew her would have recognized. She turned and ran from the room.

Brent stood looking after her, his air-gun dangling from his hand.

"Damnation! Well, the fat's in the fire now," he said unromantically, but with emphasis.

"It wasn't my fault, Kit. I did my best, but she would insist on coming out to find

you. We quarreled over it as it was and then Fritz came in and heard her."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped now. Here, you'd better take this for the moment." And he handed her a tiny package exactly like the one he had shown her before he left the room. "I only just had time to get it off the bird's leg and the other one in its place," he went on, "before Fritz pounced on me like a wild beast. Well, I hear voices; they're all coming down on me now. I'm in for it, Miriam. You scoot through the window."

She had hardly gone before Fritz and Mrs. Sanderson came in together at the door. Fritz's face was still very white, the dead bird lay limply across his palms. Mrs. Sanderson's face was flushed a deep, even brick color. Her bosom heaved under its tight black satin, she could hardly contain herself.

"There he is," said Fritz, "now he shall tell you. See what he has to say."

Brent lounged forward in his best manner. "It's about that poor little bird, Mrs. Sanderson, I suppose," he began; "I am really most awfully sorry. I can't tell you how sorry I am. Honestly, it wasn't my fault. Mrs. Lee was chipping me about my shooting, so I went out and aimed at the first bird I

saw. Never thought it was one of your pigeons. Thought it was a gull or something. And, by Jove, I hit it! First time in my life I ever hit anything. Just my rotten luck."

Fritz was glaring at him unbelievingly. "Mine pest, mine peautiful pird," he moaned; "you shoot him on purpose."

"Look here, Fritz," retorted Brent, beginning to show signs of irritation. "I can't say more than that I am most frightfully sorry, and of course I'll make your loss good and all that sort of thing, but I really think you forget yourself a little when you speak to me like that."

"It is impossible to say what the bird is worth," broke in Mrs. Sanderson, and her voice was trembling slightly. "It had won championships all over the country."

"Well, look here, Mrs. Sanderson, put a fancy price on it, never mind its intrinsic value. Charge for its character and accomplishments and all that. I don't mind. It's a rule of life that one has to pay through the nose for one's little errors."

"A little error?" asked Fritz. "I am not quite so sure, no, I am not."

"Look here, Fritz, what the devil do you mean?"

"I think you undershtand qvite well what I mean," cried Fritz, whose excitable nature was entirely thrown off its balance by this irrevocable disaster. "You play de fool, you am not a fool, no."

"Look here, I'm damned if I'm going to have a bally waiter talking to me like this. Really, Mrs. Sanderson, I can't think how you allow it. I have apologized and I have offered to pay anything in reason or out of reason for the beastly bird and there's an end of the thing as far as I'm concerned." And he stalked through the French window.

Then the two still standing in the room heard him speak in an altered voice:

"Hello, Mrs. Lee, there you are! You've got me into a nice row, twitting me about my shooting like that. Of course I've been and gone and shot one of Mrs. Sanderson's pet pigeons. I say, you know, you will have to let me give you a beating at snooker to-night as a revenge."

Fritz and Mrs. Sanderson looked at each other across the dead bird.

Fräulein, to whom the sounds of the disturbance had risen in her room, now came in and took in the situation with one horrified glance from her sharp brown eyes.

"It's the carrier?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Sanderson.

"And the map?"

"That's safe, thank God."

"Thank God!" echoed Fräulein.

"I saw Brent from my window; what does he say about it?"

"That it was an accident. He seems genuine."

"It vos no accident," commented Fritz.

"Oh, I don't know what to think!" exclaimed Fräulein, pinching her jutting little chin still further forward between her finger and thumb. "When does Charles come down?"

"He's due quite soon," replied Mrs. Sanderson. "Oh, he will be simply furious, but I think it was an accident, Luise. I've cross-questioned Brent about it."

"Accident or no accident," said Fräulein slowly, "I like not the way that things are going. What did the telegram from Charles say? It was in code, of course?"

"Yes, it said that the troops are going through and that the emergency signal must be given to-night."

They all drew closer together. The room was growing very dark. Outside on the

veranda a shadow peered for a moment round the corner of the window. It was Brent; but the next moment he had ducked and hidden, but his ear was close to the receiver in the palm.

"To-night," repeated Fräulein with a thrill in her voice. "To-night the Lord will deliver them into our hands. At what hour are we to give the signal?"

"It must be plainly visible about one," said Mrs. Sanderson. Her voice was very hushed.

"To-night," echoed Fritz in his turn. "The house, it purns to-night, that is fine. Six English pigs roast in their peds."

"No, no, Fritz," cried Mrs. Sanderson, "don't, it's too horrible. Of course we must arrange to save them." Her faded blue eyes gazed at him in genuine disgust. With her son she could work heart and soul, their aims were as one. They were genuine patriots, though their sense of duty was curiously distorted, but at least they sought no reward for, and no satisfaction of a personal kind, in their work. They lived a life of constant alarums, and through it preserved smiling faces and kept their courage high. But for Fräulein, much as she admired her, Mrs. San-

derson felt fear. This little snuff-colored, insignificant woman had a certain deadly quality of unchanging vindictiveness in her spiritual make-up which the smaller nature of Mrs. Sanderson recognized instinctively. Fritz was but of the type of useful tool; in him an inherent brutality had been turned to account. But Fräulein was of the master breed who plan and execute as well. She was single-minded, one-ideaed, and with an entirely abnormal sense of values and proportion.

"Don't give way," she said coldly to Mrs. Sanderson; "it is necessary for the safety of our plans that no one should be warned, and it is important too that only those to whom we send it shall ever guess that the signal *is* a signal. It must be natural, and what more natural than a house catching fire? Look, for instance, at Mr. Brent, how he smokes all day everywhere. Why should not he throw a match about? It is a thing that happens often. As to these people, if they burn, that will make everything safe. Why should you mind? They are our enemies, the enemies of the Fatherland, the enemies of the Lord."

"It is too terrible," repeated Mrs. Sanderson. "They must be saved."

"Think," added Fräulein, "if this signal miscarry, if the flames are put out too soon, if any suspicion arises, it is the sons of the Fatherland who will suffer and whose lives may be lost by it."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Mrs. Sanderson. "You are right. The cause demands it and the sooner we win the sooner there will be peace." She turned to Fritz, making a violent effort to pull herself together.

"Mr. Charles will give you his orders; do nothing until you have heard from him. Have you packed, Luise?"

"Everything. After twenty long years of exile I return to my own land." Fräulein pulled out her handkerchief and quite unaffectedly wiped her eyes. "Ach, *lieber Gott,* it is good, too good." She put her handkerchief back. "And my drawings," she announced in her ordinary voice, "here they are, take them, Fritz, and post them. They are all addressed. I am sending them to London to our good friend Mr. Smith, from whom they go to Holland and from there to Berlin. It is all so simple. I think now I will go and rest until the dinner hour. On occasions like this one must not tire one's mind." And with a slight inclination of her

head, the little woman folded her brown shawl about her and departed.

Fritz caught her back. "Ach, we forget. The guard on the cliff. Mr. Pennicuik, he will see the fire and make an alarm."

Fräulein looked quietly at him. "Mr. Pennicuik must not see the fire, Fritz," she said.

"But who vill stop him?"

"You will," replied Fräulein Schroeder and made a little gesture with her hand across her throat.

Fritz mimicked it with his own hand, drawing his phenomenally large thumb across his dirty collar.

"So? Good, I understand," he said and Fräulein went her way.

Mrs. Sanderson glanced round the room. "You had better tidy up here as usual, Fritz," she said to him, "nobody must suspect that things are not normal. Fold up the papers and open the window; the room's rather stuffy, there seems to be no air." She passed a handkerchief over her face as she spoke and took it away damp. Then she too went out and left Fritz alone.

He moved quickly about the room re-arranging here and there; he shook out cushions and folded up the morning's papers; and

then, stooping, picked up a few matches from the floor. The next moment he felt a heavy weight land with velocity in the small of his back, as though someone's knee had just been planted firmly there, and a handkerchief was knotted swiftly round his eyes. He called out and tried to throw the weight off, but he was too much at a disadvantage. He felt a hand slip into his pocket and the envelope Fräulein had given him being withdrawn and then the noise of a hurried exit through the window. He spun round, feeling a sharp stab of pain go through his back as he did so and wrenched the handkerchief off his head. He dashed to the window and peered out into the dusk, then turned on the lights. But there was no one to be seen.

CHAPTER X

Of all the people dressing for dinner that evening at Wave Crest, only two—Mr. Pollock and Miss Myrtle—were in blissful ignorance that strange things were toward. Fräulein, refreshed by her little rest, was calmly buttoning herself into her high gown of plaid silk. She showed no trace of extra excitement, but a certain inward glow seemed to suffuse her dry little personality. The end for which she had been working for so many years was close at hand at last. For twenty years all her spiritual life had centered in the achievement of that end, to an extent inconceivable to anyone not a Prussian. An Englishman, of course, feels loyalty. He is quite cheerfully prepared to die for his country, "and all that sort of thing," as he would say. But it is only the German who has been educated to such a pitch of what one may call country-love, that he considers everything done in its name is right. This is caused not so much by the different character of the two races as by the different ideal which

has been set before them. England might be called the nurse of the world. She takes young countries, holds them severely in check, rules them, trains them up, and as they grow fitted for liberty and self-government, so she gives it to them. Germany's ideal is far otherwise. It is the antiquated ideal of the absolute monarchy swelled to its uttermost limits, the ideal of what is called glory, and of which the essence is self-aggrandisement, though self may be translated into terms of Kaiser and Country. Nevertheless a spiritual passion is the strongest in the world, and is a thing which has always made history. And the lying, the plotting, and the deliberate cruelties of such spies as those at Wave Crest were after all the outermost ramifications of this ideal. The work of spies is sordid and absurdly melodramatic, and altogether what an Englishman would class as "bad form," but in the majority of cases it is at least inspired by a genuine passion. It was so with all the spies at Wave Crest, though in a much less degree with Fritz than with the others. But Fräulein moved on the fires of her conviction as on wings. And the Sandersons, mother and son, though less strained and excitable, were equally con-

vinced of the righteousness of their cause and faced all the risks they ran with iron nerve.

The moral danger with all spies, even such legitimate work as that being carried out by Brent and Mrs. Lee, is that a long course of lying is apt to undermine the individual's sense of values. Christopher felt this danger himself. Not at the moments when he was busy and the excitement and the risk kept his brain occupied, but in the flat moments after any violent action. He was feeling it now, as, ready dressed, he sat on his bed for a few minutes and tried to get himself in tune again before going downstairs. He had lied hard all day to Molly; the thing had been absolutely necessary and he had done it. The point was, would Molly ever trust in him again when she discovered what a very good liar he was? Anyone can forgive a necessary lie, but a too great pitch of accomplishment is suspicious—if a thing comes so easily it is ten to one that instinct will turn it on whenever convenient, or at the least, the temptation will be there.

Christopher Brent realized this, but being very human, that did not worry him nearly as much as the idea that Molly too might

see it from that point of view. He had tried that day, as much as was consistent with loyalty to his work, to lie just so clumsily that Molly, when she knew everything, would not be able to reproach him with being very adept. A Machiavellian course like this was as fine drawn, and subtle as a gray hair on a white cloth, and Brent felt that even his quick instincts and intuitive perceptions could not save him from a bad blunder with Molly much longer. He must simply try and keep out of her way as much as possible this evening, that was all. Whatever happened he must not bring more of her questioning upon himself until he could answer her truthfully. A sudden distaste for the whole business swept over him. He was in that lax mood when even excitement appears a weariness to the flesh. It was true, he reflected, that the Sandersons were betraying the country which had taken them in and trusted them, from whom they had got money, position, comfort, but he too, who sat at the Sandersons' table and broke bread with them, was planning to bring about their downfall. It was an odious necessity. At this point in his reflections his sense of humor mercifully came to his aid and he remembered that the

"bread" consisted so often of pigeons and that at least he was paying three guineas a week for the privilege of eating it.

He got up and stretched himself, but stopped suddenly as the sound of a piano being played in the hall suddenly began to surge through the house. Christopher went to his door and listened. It was Molly playing, he knew that. Her particular talent was music and she had really studied hard. But her playing, though charming, had always lacked force and depth. Now these qualities, though still tentative and unequal as though they were trying to force their way through, were at last to be heard in her playing. Chris listened for a moment with a little smile of sympathy and understanding tugging at his mouth. Then, as he recognized the *Danse Macabre* and heard the dry rattling of the skeletons, he felt a little shiver. Why had she chosen to play that grisly composition to-night of all nights? He straightened himself, turned out the light and went downstairs and out to the veranda. He knew that Charles Sanderson had been taken to his mother's room when he arrived and that the disaster to the pigeon must have been made known to him. What he did not know

was whether the supposed map had yet been discovered to be a dummy. He went out along the deserted veranda to where his little Eavesdropper's Friend was concealed in the palm. He could see by the thin line of light between the drawn curtains of the sitting-room that people were within, and crouching down he prepared to listen.

There were only two voices speaking in the sitting-room, and they were the voices of Charles Sanderson and Fritz.

"So now you think it is Brent, do you?" Charles was saying.

He was speaking very low, but every word was audible through the mysterious agency of the little disc.

"I am sure it must be Prent. I watch and I watch Mr. Pollock and I see him do no more, but I see Prent with mine own eyes shoot the pird."

"But my mother says he did not seem at all upset or confused," remarked Charles. "Either he is an utter fool or excessively clever. I wish I knew which. Damn him, anyway. The work of months ruined, ruined, and all by this blithering creature with an eyeglass. But the map's safe, thank goodness."

"Ah, dat, yes," replied Fritz, "but I have more bad news. Another dreadful thing that has happened to me."

"What! Good God! Out with it, man! What have you done now?"

"It is not I who have done anything," replied Fritz in an injured voice. "Fräulein Schroeder, she give me a letter mit plans to post. She and Mrs. Sanderson go out, I was left to myself here. I begin to tidy the room. Suddenly from nowhere someone spring upon my back; my back, it is nearly broke, and tied dis handkerchief about mine eyes. One second only and I tear it off, but it is too late, he is gone and de plans also."

Sanderson walked up and down the room for a moment, not trusting himself to speak. "What a damn fool you are!" he said at last. "First the Marconi, then the pigeon, and now the plans. Who is it? Who the devil is it?"

"It is Prent," Fritz repeated stolidly. "I am sure. Mr. Pollock, he is a strong man and heavy, but I do not think he could have leaped on my back like that. Anyway, here is de handkerchief," and he pulled a large red and green bandanna, still knotted, from his pocket.

Followed a little silence, during which Brent rightly guessed that Charles must be examining the handkerchief. Brent's shoulders shook a little with a silent laugh, for the handkerchief, as he very well knew when he had used it, was not his at all, but the one Mr. Pollock had dropped during his indignant exit. The idea to use it had come to Christopher in one of those flashes to which he always trusted.

"Well, there's no mark on it," Charles said at last, "might belong to anybody. Pah! it smells of scent; scent and tobacco."

"Mr. Prent, he use scent," cried Fritz eagerly. "I see a pottle of eau-de-Cologne on his dressing-table."

"This isn't eau-de-Cologne. Well, I must find out. You had better be getting on with the dinner now, Fritz. Clear out."

Fritz cleared out and Brent made his way into the hall. Molly was still playing stormily and took no notice of him.

She was dressed very simply in a little pale pink gown with a blue sash, and the pallor which had been hers all day had given place to a bright flush on her cheeks. Brent thought he had never seen her look so triumphantly pretty and so childishly young.

Mrs. Lee, coming down the stairs in a wonderful black and gold gown, seemed suddenly old and faded to his eyes. Unconscious of this—indeed, aware of looking her best—Miriam came across the hall and under cover of the music spoke eagerly but very low to Brent.

"Well, anything fresh?" she asked.

"Nothing in particular," replied Brent, beginning to move slowly in the direction of the sitting-room with her. "I think everything's fairly clear now. We have got to prevent 'em burning the house down to-night and we've got to get our signals through to the cruisers, that's all."

"It's horrible," said Miriam. "I shouldn't have thought human beings could have planned to do such a dreadful thing. It's fiendish."

Brent shrugged his shoulders. "They're logical enough," he said; "it's all war."

"It seems to me we're taking too great a chance, Kit," went on Miriam. "What's going to happen to the others? Suppose they do manage to fire the house, there's Miss Myrtle, Mr. Pollock—Molly."

"My dear girl, don't I know it? The fact that I know it and remain calm ought to show

you how sure I am of success. If I were to give the show away now and have the whole bally lot arrested we miss nabbing our friend Uzz, to say nothing of perhaps letting a lot of other people get warned of the failure too soon so that they can slip away."

"All right, Kit, but I've got nerves somehow. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to appear to go to bed in the ordinary way, just as if nothing had happened. And then——"

Here the door of the sitting-room opened and Charles came toward them.

"Would you believe it," continued Brent, as though going on with a story, "he actually went three in no trumps."

"What is this tragic tale, Mr. Brent?" asked Charles.

"It's about an idiot who went three in no trumps without a spade in his hand. Can you imagine anything more ghastly?"

"Are you going to have a rubber tonight?" asked Charles, turning and strolling back into the sitting-room with them.

"No, Mrs. Lee has challenged me to a game of snooker after dinner. We've got a pair of gloves on it."

"Have a cigarette?" asked Charles, "that

is, if Mrs. Lee doesn't object," and he held out his case toward Brent.

"No thanks, I'm a piper."

"Are you? What sort of tobacco do you smoke?"

Miriam, to whom all this conversation was so much Greek, watched the two with puzzled eyes. It was obvious to her that Charles was trying to find out something, but what, she could not tell.

"I have rather a special mixture," replied Brent casually, "a little tobacconist makes it up for me."

"Oh? It's scented, isn't it?" asked Charles.

"Scented? No, I don't think so. I'm sure it isn't," and Brent pulled out his pouch and sniffed at it.

"Most people jeer at scented tobacco," remarked Charles in a chatty manner, "but I rather like it myself. I have always had a keen sense of smell from my boyhood, and there's nothing I enjoy more than a really good sniff, at a rose, for example, or even a good perfume. I suppose it's an effeminate habit, but I always use some on my handkerchief."

"Oh, do you?" Brent's voice betrayed

nothing but a polite assumption of interest. "I don't myself. Can't stand it."

"Oh, then this handkerchief isn't yours, I suppose? Someone's evidently dropped it and I picked it up," and Charles sniffed again at the bandanna which he had drawn from his pocket.

At this moment, Mr. Pollock, displaying a marvelous expanse of glossy shirt front, came into the room.

"Hallo, Sanderson, you're back, I see," he boomed. "That's splendid. Telling Brent the latest news from town, eh?"

"No, as a matter of fact we were discussing perfumes," replied Charles casually, still drawing the handkerchief lightly across his nostrils. He suddenly held it out toward Brent. "It is yours, isn't it, Brent?" he asked.

Chris took the handkerchief and inspected it blandly, but Mr. Pollock, cramming his pincenez more firmly down on his nose, darted forward.

"No, dash it all, it's not. That's mine," he said, and snatched it from Brent's hands.

Fritz, coming in at that moment to announce dinner, stopped dead, bereft of speech.

CHAPTER XI

Dinner that night was a triumph of civilization. Mere animals cannot dissemble. That is an accomplishment which comes with education. And, always with the exception of Mr. Pollock and the Myrtle, everyone at Wave Crest played a part and played it well during dinner. There was probably hardly a word of truth spoken.

After dinner the Sandersons and Fräulein gathered together for a council of war in the sitting-room.

Mrs. Sanderson had changed her black satin dress for another, also of black satin, cut in what is known as a "modest V." At dinner she had looked very pleasant, very dignified. Now her face was pale with anxiety, and the innumerable tiny veins that went to make her usual color showed patchily. She was very anxious, so was Charles. But he showed no signs of it beyond an increasing grimness in the setting of his lips, and added pucker between his fair brows. Fräulein still burned with that inward glow and was the most confident of the three, because she was

upheld with the fires of her spiritual conviction.

"Something tells me it is Brent," declared Fräulein firmly.

"Fritz thought so for a time," said Charles moodily, "but now he thinks it is Pollock again. Certainly Pollock is quite strong and vigorous enough to have got those plans away from Fritz."

"But if so," argued Mrs. Sanderson, "why did Pollock admit that the handkerchief was his?"

"My dear mother, whoever we are up against is certainly no fool, and he may have done it as a blind. In fact, if he *did* do it, claiming the handkerchief was about the cleverest thing he could have done. The trouble is, we are faced with the two alternatives of Brent and Pollock, and whichever one of them it is must have a genius for acting. Whether it is Pollock's pompousness or Brent's fatuity that is the mask, the *finesse* of it is simply incredible."

"Ach," said Fräulein suddenly, "what about Mrs. Lee?"

"Mrs. Lee! I wonder. . . . Yes, that is quite a possible idea. What do you think, mother?"

"I certainly think it might be Mrs. Lee. We know nothing of her. She simply sent a telegram and came down."

"It is quite the type," continued Fräulein. "The charming widow, with money, traveling alone."

"And in that case," said Charles, pursuing the idea to its logical outcome, "it is probably Brent as well. They're thick as thieves."

Mrs. Sanderson shook her head. "I do not think so," she said. "If it is Mrs. Lee, she is a very clever woman as well as a very charming one, and she probably hit upon Brent as her most likely tool. You see, it was she who taunted him into shooting that pigeon this evening."

"We must make sure," said Fräulein. "What about Miss Pollock, the girl? She is in love with Brent. Surely there is a way we can use her?"

"We might tell her that Brent's a spy in the pay of the Germans," suggested Charles.

"Ach, she'd only laugh at us," said Fräulein. "It must be done better than that. Brent has not yet explained why he can't enlist. Miss Pollock must be made to think of

that. She will confront him, and if he doesn't satisfy her——"

"My dear Fräulein," broke in Charles impatiently, "if Christopher Brent represents the English Intelligence Department, a harem of beauty won't get the truth out of him."

They were interrupted by Fritz, who burst into the room obviously in a state of great excitement.

"Mr. Karl, sair," he cried, "Madame, de map it is not dat I place on the pigeon's leg. Just now have I examined it and I find it has been changed."

"Damnation," said Charles. "Here, give it to me. By God, it is a substitution, waterproof silk and all. This proves it."

"That it is Brent?" asked Fräulein. "Ach, I am not surprised."

"We must muzzle him to-night," said Charles. "The question is how? Getting him up to his room on some pretext and gagging and tying him up there, is too risky."

"Ach, but wait," advised Fräulein. "I have a plan." She folded her little arms on the table and leant forward across them to him, her shoulders hunched up under her brown shawl, looking not unlike a big bird of prey, with her features that were so sharp

for the broad modeling of her face, and her bright brown eyes.

"We will tell Mr. Pollock first," she went on, "and suggest he warn his daughter. Pollock is a magistrate. He doesn't love Brent and wants to get him out of the way as much as we do. If we make out a good case, he will have him arrested at once on suspicion."

"Whatever kind of yarn can we spring on Pollock?"

"The truth is good enough for me," said Fräulein placidly.

"The truth?" asked Mrs. Sanderson.

"Yes. Is not Charles a servant of the English Admiralty? Does he not lose here valuable papers?"

"By Jove, Fräulein!" said Charles, "you have got it." He did not gesticulate like Fritz or show emotion as readily as his mother, but even he seemed to gleam more with suppressed excitement, though he sat quite still in his chair.

"Find Mr. Pollock, Fritz," he ordered, "and ask him if he will come in here a moment. See that we are not disturbed."

"Very well, sir."

"I will go," said Fräulein. "It would not do to have me, a German, present at this in-

terview. You must tell me afterwards." She wrapped her shawl about her plaid shoulders and departed with Fritz.

A moment later, and Mr. Pollock loomed in the doorway, his face beaming with an after-dinner rosiness.

"Fritz says you have been kind enough to invite me to have a cigar with you," he said cheerfully.

Charles rose and drew a chair up to the table for him.

"I shall be charmed if you will have the cigar," he said, offering one. "But the real reason of the request is that my mother and I want the benefit of your counsel."

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Pollock, much gratified and pulling his chair in with the air of a chairman at a board meeting. "I shall be very pleased to do anything I can. As a J.P., of course, I have had great experience of human nature, and I may be able to throw a little light on anything that is puzzling you. What is it all about?"

Mrs. Sanderson leant forward confidentially across the table.

"You are very good, Mr. Pollock," she said. "The fact is, we are in a very awkward predicament."

"Indeed, you don't say so. I'm very sorry to hear it, I'm sure."

"It is this way," began Charles, leaning forward in his turn, so that Mr. Pollock was fairly hemmed in by Sandersons; "when I came down from London last night, I brought with me certain important papers, Government secrets. Those papers have disappeared."

Mr. Pollock stared at him, mouth and eyes open. "You don't say so," he ejaculated. "That is serious, very serious. What do you suppose has happened to them?"

"Stolen," replied Charles briefly.

"Good God!" said Mr. Pollock. "This is really terrible. Do you suspect anyone?"

"We suspect that one of our number is a spy."

Mr. Pollock almost bounded in his chair. It is one thing to talk glibly about spies, plans, maps, and all the rest of the bag of tricks, just as one may discuss a terrible railway accident on the other side of the globe. It is a very different thing, however, to have it made real to one by some intimate connection. Spies exist, of course; so do railway accidents, but these things have nothing to do with one's self or even one's own friends

and relations. If Mr. Pollock had been pressed for definitions he would have said they happened in newspapers, and now here he was sitting at a table with the Sandersons, being quite solemnly and quietly informed that there was a German spy in the house.

"So it really is true," he said, as though half to himself.

"What is true?" asked Mrs. Sanderson quickly.

"Spies and all that. . . . I suppose there really is such a thing . . ."

"But my dear Mr. Pollock!" replied Mrs. Sanderson, "you read us paragraphs about spies out loud from the papers every day, you above everyone have always been thinking and talking about spies. Why, then, should you be so surprised?"

"It seems so different in the papers," said poor Mr. Pollock weakly. "What a terrible thing! In this house, you say, Sanderson? Surely you must be mistaken."

"I'm afraid not," replied Charles quietly. He had kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Pollock's tell-tale face ever since that gentleman had entered the room.

"Of course it's either Fritz or Fräulein," said Mr. Pollock.

"It's neither, I'm afraid. Fräulein's position, of course, is too obvious for her to indulge in such a thing even if she wanted to. As for Fritz, I have all his movements accounted for, and I have searched his room; besides, his Dutch papers are perfectly in order."

Mr. Pollock began to count off the remaining guests on his short, podgy fingers.

"Well, then, there's only my daughter; that is out of the question, of course. Miss Myrtle"—and an involuntary smile of contempt broke from him—"why, the mere idea is absurd. Then there's Brent, he is too much of a fool, and Mrs. Lee,—and myself." Here he came to an abrupt pause and slowly his face became suffused with an even stronger rosiness than usual. "Good heavens!" he went on, "you don't mean to say you have got the impertinence to suggest that I—if you have brought me in here to insult me—that accounts for why that little foreign devil of a Fritz has been dogging my footsteps all day—by Heavens—I'll——"

"Dear Mr. Pollock," interrupted Mrs. Sanderson, "do pray keep calm; it isn't you we suspect at all. How could we? In fact,

it is in your official capacity as a Justice of the Peace that we have called you in."

Mr. Pollock very slowly subsided again, rather like one of those penny toys blown out with air which diminish and collapse in front of the hawkers on the London pavements.

The Sandersons waited until calm was restored. Then Charles spoke.

"We suspect Mr. Brent," he said, "and, very likely, Mrs. Lee."

"Brent! Pooh, nonsense, too much of a fool."

"We have grave doubts," replied Charles, not without a certain dry humor, "as to his lack of intelligence."

"And Mrs. Lee, you say?" went on Mr. Pollock. "Mrs. Lee and Brent? By Jove, that explains a lot. Why Brent wouldn't enlist, and why he and Mrs. Lee have been sitting in each other's pockets. . . . My girl's had a lucky escape, and so I shall tell her."

"That was another reason," replied Mrs. Sanderson, "why I thought you ought to be told."

"Very right, Mrs. Sanderson, very right indeed, but even in my private capacity, still less in my judicial one, I never jump to conclusions. Have you any proof against

Brent? Do you know that he has got the papers?"

"No, the case rests on suspicion only at present," answered Charles; "that is where we thought you or your daughter could help us. You will not forget, Mr. Pollock, that it is your bounden duty as an Englishman to use every means in your power to discover these papers, which are of vital importance to the Admiralty."

"Certainly, oh, certainly, but I don't see what my daughter can do."

"I gather from what my mother has told me that Miss Pollock has more influence with Brent than anyone else has, and from what I have observed myself I should say that whatever duplicity he may indulge in elsewhere, he is very genuinely devoted to her."

"I thought so until to-day myself," admitted Mr. Pollock. "But I don't believe Molly would consent to try to get anything out of Brent. When I tried to throw suspicion on him to-day about not enlisting and about Mrs. Lee, she only said that she trusted him absolutely and all that sort of stuff. You know what women are."

"But don't forget," put in Mrs. Sanderson, "that Mrs. Lee is involved in this suspicion,

too, when you arouse Miss Molly to take steps."

"Ah, if we could prove that, then Molly would be cured of this undesirable attachment. Upon my word, I almost wish we could."

"If I may speak for my sex," went on Mrs. Sanderson, "I should say that even a hint that Mrs. Lee and Mr. Brent were working together would be sufficient to make your daughter determined to try and find out the truth."

A slow smile spread over Mr. Pollock's face. "Set a woman to catch a woman, eh?" he asked wisely. "Especially when there is a man in the case!" And he gave the satisfied chuckle of the man who understands all about women.

Mrs. Sanderson shook her finger at him. "You know too much, Mr. Pollock!" she said archly. "You make none of us feel safe."

"Observation, my dear lady, merely observation. In my position as a Justice of the Peace, I have had very queer aspects of human nature brought under my notice, and one thing I have discovered—that all women are alike, all of them."

"You will understand, Mr. Pollock, why

my mother and I called you in to help us. We feel that you, with your wide experience, are the man to handle the situation authoritatively and delicately."

"My dear sir, just leave it to me, leave it entirely to me. If I can prove even anything mysterious against Brent he shall be laid by the heels to-night."

"Let us hope for his sake that you will not be able to," Charles replied. "Have another cigar, Mr. Pollock. Mother, perhaps you will find Miss Pollock and ask her to come in here to her father. I will just go and have a turn on the cliff, it's a lovely night."

Left alone, Mr. Pollock puffed furiously at his cigar, determined to be both firm and tactful, and trying to arrange how he should go about it. He felt completely master of the situation when Molly came into the room.

CHAPTER XII

THE bright color still held in Molly's cheeks and her eyes glittered. She had been at the piano again since dinner, while the others were all playing their respective games, and she still had the tenseness of aspect which a piano can give, as though something of the quality of its wires passed into the performer through the finger-tips.

Molly had been playing like someone possessed, and she was possessed by jealousy and fear, the two worst feelings known to the soul. Up till now everything had gone so easily in life for Molly. At school she had been popular with the girls, because she was pretty and sweet and not clever enough to make them feel uncomfortable; and popular with the mistresses because she was intelligent enough, backed by her prettiness and sweetness, to do them credit. Also hers was the gift possessed by so many people who have never felt intensely, the gift of attracting affection. She had loved Brent quite naturally, and as easily as she loved a summer's

day or a dance or a box of chocolates. There had never been anything about her love to make her afraid either of herself or of him —and perfect love makes fear. Fear of the Fates, lest the whole universe from lightning to a taxi-cab should be bent on the destruction of the loved one. Fear of one's self that such known emotions should be stronger than a lifetime's training. Fear of the other lest he should wake up one morning and find himself no longer in love. The last of these fears had hold of Molly now and was teaching her all the others. From merely loving she had fallen in love. Even Mr. Pollock saw something unusual and disconcerting about her to-night as she came into the room and stood in front of him.

"What's the matter, father?" she asked, and if such a thing had been possible when she was speaking to him, Mr. Pollock would have thought her voice sounded bored. "Mrs. Sanderson told me you wanted to speak to me about something important."

"So I do, so I do. Sit down, my child. You don't look quite yourself, and I'm not surprised, I'm sure. It has been a most disturbing day in many ways."

Molly sat down and Mr. Pollock came and loomed over her from the hearth-rug.

"I have something of very grave importance to say to you. Something of international importance," he announced.

A little smile flitted over Molly's face. She was beginning to see the funny side of her parent.

"It all sounds very thrilling," she answered. "What is it about?"

"It is about your—your late admirer, Christopher Brent."

The polite attention went out of Molly's face. She leant wearily back in her chair.

"Oh, father, don't start that again. I'm so tired of it. You have said quite enough about it."

"Have I, indeed? And let me tell you, miss, this is something you have never heard before," said Mr. Pollock, his tact flying away in his excitement. "You were not aware, I take it, that Mr. Brent is suspected of being a spy—a German spy?"

Molly stared at him a moment and burst out laughing. "Oh, father, that's really too ridiculous! However did you get hold of that idea?"

"This is no laughing matter. You may be

sure, Molly, I should not distress you by telling it you unless I had good grounds for the assertion. Certain important documents which the Admiralty had intrusted to young Sanderson have disappeared."

"That is no reason why Chris should have stolen them."

"I am quite aware of that. As a Justice of the Peace, Molly, I have learned not to connect statements too rashly and without proof. I do not positively say that Brent has stolen them. What I do say is that suspicion points in his direction. As a matter of fact, it points in the direction of Mrs. Lee as well."

"Mrs. Lee!" Molly's supine figure straightened to uprightness. "I shouldn't be surprised if it was Mrs. Lee, I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

The process of reasoning that had taken place so quickly in Molly's mind was as follows: "Mrs. Lee is flirting with Chris. I love Chris. Therefore Mrs. Lee is a German spy." This satisfied Molly completely. She could not help feeling glad that Mrs. Lee was a spy. Although, of course, she was very sorry that important Admiralty papers had been stolen.

"There you are, then!" cried Mr. Pollock triumphantly. "What was I telling you?"

"That's not the same thing as saying it's Chris," declared Molly somewhat elliptically. "I won't believe it of him, nothing would make me."

"Can you explain why they are so intimate then? If it isn't that, it's certainly something else," and Mr. Pollock resettled his pincenez with an air of triumph.

Molly sat silent, clutching the arms of the chair.

"They are supposed to have met yesterday for the first time," continued Mr. Pollock remorselessly. "Any fool can see that's a fairy tale. Can't you?"

Molly did not answer, but her head drooped a little lower.

"Very well, then, if they had met before yesterday why did they conceal it? If their acquaintance is innocent why should not they be open about it? Then there's another thing. Why doesn't Brent enlist? He says he can't. Very well, then, let him give his reasons. He declines to. Something fishy about that, eh? Well, haven't you got anything to say?"

"Mrs. Lee a spy . . ." repeated Molly

thoughtfully, having taken not the slightest notice of this last speech of her father's. For it flashed across her that this would account for a great deal. If Mrs. Lee were a spy, and if Chris too were a spy, it meant that he did not necessarily care for her, after all; that they were merely working together. Molly raised her head and looked triumphant.

Then, as realization of what it meant to be a spy began to dawn on her, she had to throw this comforting thought aside. She endeavored to find a solution which would clear Chris, both of undue personal interest in Miriam and of complicity in her designs.

"I'm sure Chris isn't a spy," she said at last. "That woman has used him, that's what it is. You know how Chris believes everything he hears; he is much too good—that's what's the matter with him. She's just used him. She's the spy, I'm sure of it."

Matters were not going quite as Mr. Pollock had wished. "I'm bound to tell you," he pointed out, "that suspicion rests primarily and most strongly upon Brent."

Molly sat for a moment with her fingers pressed over her eyes, thinking back over the events of the day. She thought of how

Miriam had prevented her running out to Chris when he was on the lawn with his air-gun, and how it had turned out afterwards that it had been Mrs. Lee who had teased him into shooting the pigeon, which showed she had some amount of influence over him. Molly remembered, too, a little incident that had occurred that evening as she was going up to dress for dinner. She was passing Mrs. Lee's room, the door of which had swung slightly open, and she had seen her standing by the dressing-table in the act of taking something from the front of her gown. For no other reason than that everything Mrs. Lee did was a source of unwilling interest to Molly, the girl stopped for a second and looked at her. It had been a folded paper which Mrs. Lee took from her gown and which she slipped inside a handkerchief sachet lying on the dressing-table. Molly had watched her idly; and then, suddenly aware that she was doing rather an odd thing in gazing through someone's bedroom door, had fled on to her own room. Now the little incident assumed potentialities unthought of before. Molly jumped up.

"Father, I have an idea. I have thought of something. Wait, I'll see what I can do.

I'll be back in a minute." She ran toward the door, and, as it happened, straight into Brent, who entered at the moment. He had caught hold of her arms just above the elbow before he saw Mr. Pollock, who was glowering at him from the hearth-rug. His fingers gave a swift, reassuring pressure before he dropped his hands. He looked from Pollock to Molly.

"Awfully sorry if I'm disturbing you," he said. "We've run out of chalk in the billiard room, and Mrs. Sanderson said I should find some in the drawer here."

"Don't run away," said Molly in a low, urgent voice. "I want to talk to you. I'll be back in a minute," and she ran out of the room. Molly went swiftly through the deserted hall, past the silent piano and up the stairs. When she reached Mrs. Lee's door her courage slackened somewhat. Never in all her life had Molly done any of the petty, dishonorable actions many schoolgirls indulge in. Now, just because Mrs. Lee was suspected of being a spy, she in her turn was going to spy on her. . . . Molly went through, in a far lesser degree, what Brent had been feeling alone in his room that evening before dinner. Then the thought of Chris came

surging back at her, and she gently turned the handle of the door. The room was in darkness; she switched on the light and entered, shutting the door behind her. Her heart was beating violently. She knew that Mrs. Lee had been playing snooker since dinner with Chris; and now that he was in the sitting-room with her father, Mrs. Lee might come upstairs for any woman's reason, just such a little thing as wishing to powder her nose. And then what could Molly say at being caught in her room? Nevertheless, Molly could not resist a quick survey, an attempt to try to see something which would be a clue to Mrs. Lee's personality. As a matter of fact, remarkably few personal touches had been imparted to the conventional white-painted, chintz-hung apartment. Over the gleaming brass rail at the foot of the bed a wonderful dressing-gown had been thrown, a barbaric thing of strong reds and blues, with gold thread shimmering through it, a very different dressing-gown from Molly's own little white wrapper bordered with swan's down. The luggage showed signs of hard wear, the dressing-table set was of tortoise-shell with a gold inlaid monogram. Molly considered it rather bizarre. Beside the mir-

ror lay the handkerchief sachet she had noticed before dinner. Molly slipped her fingers in, but they met only handkerchiefs. Exploring further she found an opening in the lining, and this time pulled out the folded sheet of tracing paper. A glance at it, though of course she could not understand its import, told her that it was some kind of a plan. Thrusting it in her own dress, Molly turned out the light, opened the door a little way, listened, and crept out. She felt a different being as she went down the stairs again. Could this be she, the Molly who had thought life was all fun and happiness and Chris? This Molly spied and stole, and all with a certain feeling of fierceness at the back of her mind which she only remembered having experienced once before in her life; and that was when as a tiny girl her father had threatened to have her dog destroyed because he bit the postman. Molly had fought then for her dog, had raised every argument against the postman and for her beloved Micky, and she had won. Now she was fighting for something far more vital. And just as she would not have minded if the postman had put a stop to the controversy by conveniently falling down dead, so now she did not

mind what she could prove against Mrs. Lee if she could only save Chris. As she reached the sitting-room door, she heard Mr. Pollock's voice booming even more loudly than usual, and recognized in the sound of it that he had lost his temper. His attempt at diplomacy must have failed him, and anxious lest he had worked Chris into one of his obstinate moods, Molly broke in on them.

CHAPTER XIII

A SILENCE fell as Molly entered, and she stood looking from one to the other of the two men.

"Oh, father, what have you been saying to Chris?" she asked. "I asked you to leave it to me, didn't I?"

"I have been merely—with the greatest tact and diplomacy—asking a few questions that I have a perfect right to ask. I have been giving Mr. Brent an opportunity he has not seen fit to take, of confiding in me, and promised him that if he chose to do so, I for one would try to help him. Nobody can accuse me of being a narrow-minded man, and I hope I have been able to make allowances and see the thing fairly."

Brent turned and looked in pathetic helplessness at Molly.

"Can you tell me what your father is talking about?" he asked. "Of course I thought he was going to talk about you and I started in to confide right away, but he said I was impertinent."

"Father, dear, do go away and leave it to me," said Molly, going up to him and taking the lapels of his coat in her two hands. "I am sure I can manage Chris a great deal better alone." Molly had not yet learned not to use the word "manage" out loud.

"Oh, very well, very well, I'll go. Thought you might like my support and protection. Of course girls think they know best nowadays." And Mr. Pollock moved heavily toward the door.

"I say," said Chris cheerfully, to his retreating form, "you might take over my cue at snooker with Mrs. Lee, will you? She must think it's jolly rude my leaving her like this." Mr. Pollock's only answer was a snort as he banged the door behind him.

Molly and Chris were left standing looking at each other, with a new shyness and constraint between them. Then Brent strolled over to the mantelpiece and leaned his elbow on it, speaking to her over his shoulder.

"I suppose you want me to explain about this afternoon?" he asked.

"No; at least, that will come into the general explanation, that's all. Chris, what's the matter?"

"Well, if it comes to that, what's the mat-

ter with your father? I say, do you mind a pipe?"

"No," answered Molly a little drearily. He could think about pipes when she was so obviously unhappy!

"My nerves want soothing," explained Brent as he lit up. "I say, what has your father got into his head now?"

"Oh, he's worried."

"Well, he's worried me, I can tell you."

"You know how funny father is sometimes," said Molly lamely.

"Yes, it's a humor all his own. What's his latest?"

"Well, it's too absurd for words really," began Molly, forcing herself to speak naturally, laughing a little. She curled herself up in the big chair again and looked up at Brent under her lashes as she half lay there. In the glow of the shaded lights she looked very childish and pathetically small, a little air of worldly wisdom that she had adopted sitting quaintly on her.

Brent felt all the best in his love for her well up as he looked. The temptation came over him to throw everything aside, to tell her the truth, so that she would trust him again. That is to say, the wish that it were

possible to do so came over him with almost unbearable poignancy, but the idea was almost too remote to be a temptation. It merely presented itself as a thing that would have been so restful and comforting could he only have done it.

He did not go near her and sit on the arm of the chair as she had been confident he must, but still stood in front of the fireplace, as a man always does when on the defensive.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Well, it's about spies. He's got them on the brain, poor dear."

"Spies? Poor chap," commented Brent, drawing at his pipe.

"He even suspects," continued Molly, "that there's one in this house. Just imagine!"

"By Jove, you don't say so? I say, Molly, that's really funny. When did the old dear think of that?"

"Of course you—you don't think it's possible, do you, Chris?"

"I don't know. Everything's possible, I suppose, but I should say it was excessively unlikely. Whatever's put the idea into his head?"

"Charles Sanderson."

"Nonsense."

"No, no, I don't mean that he suspects him, but Mr. Sanderson has lost some very important document, something belonging to the Admiralty."

"Careless beggar, that's all I can say."

"When I say lost it," went on Molly, "I mean it's disappeared. It's been stolen, down here."

"Well, of course it's dashed awkward for him," answered Chris. "The Admiralty won't like that at all. When did he miss it?"

"I don't know. Some time to-day, I suppose. He told father about it after dinner."

Chris began to chuckle. "I'll bet I know who your father thinks it is. Dear old Fräulein Schroeder."

"No, he doesn't suspect Fräulein, neither does Mr. Sanderson."

"Fritz, I suppose."

"No, nor Fritz," said Molly impatiently, "nor Miss Myrtle, nor his mother, nor me. Oh, Chris, can't you guess?"

Brent stared at her with his pipe in his hand and his mouth open. Then a slow smile seemed to beam out all over him. "You don't mean to say it's me?" he asked. "By Jove, that's priceless. How pleased the old

dear must be, because he's got his knife into me anyway. I say, that's the greatest compliment I have ever had paid me. No one's ever thought me brainy enough before," and he continued chuckling with pleasure after he put his pipe back in his mouth.

"They suspect Mrs. Lee too," added Molly, watching him narrowly.

The laughter sank away from Brent, leaving him very grave. "Eh, what?" he asked.

"Chris, you must admit you've let father have some excuse for thinking of you, because of your not doing anything, I mean."

"Oh, I understand that right enough, but why drag in Mrs. Lee?"

"That's only guess-work on their part so far," answered Molly, "but I—"—she paused nervously, then went on—"I can prove she's a spy."

"Look here, Molly, do you know you are saying very serious things? You must be careful."

"Oh, I know; it's serious enough to me too, Chris. I know you are in her power."

Chris seized the opportunity to roar with laughter.

"My darling child," he said. "Have you been reading a penny novelette, or going to

the melodrama on the pier? 'In her power!' Do I say, 'Unhand me, villain'? Do prompt me, Molly."

"Ah, you are being cruel," flashed Molly. "I know I'm not clever like—like Mrs. Lee, but you shouldn't sneer at me. Chris, how can you!"

"Darling." Chris was beside her and had gathered her in his arms. "I was a pig, a brute, I admit it, but I wasn't sneering, I was only making a little fun of you. It's all so ridiculous, dear heart. Come, let's kiss and make it up and not spoil our few minutes together by being so absurd."

For one blissful moment Molly let herself yield to his caress and closed her eyes like a tired child as her head rested on his shoulder. Then she pulled herself together and with a determination he had never seen in her before, thrust him away and sat up.

"Chris, you don't quite realize what has happened this evening," she began, "and I can't help you unless you tell me the truth. For one thing, you told me you had never met Mrs. Lee before."

"Yes, I did tell you that," admitted Brent, "though I suppose you don't believe it after this afternoon. Look here, sweetheart, let's

understand one another. You think that I'm in Mrs. Lee's power as you put it, and that she's a German spy. What makes you think that?"

"I know it."

"How do you know it?"

Molly slipped her fingers down inside her frock and brought out the folded paper. Chris took it. It was still warm from its contact with her, but Chris was too absorbed in the business in hand to notice other than mechanically what would normally have been such a sweet detail for a lover.

"Do you know what that is?" demanded Molly.

"Looks like a map."

"It is a map. It's the one that Charles Sanderson lost. I found it in Mrs. Lee's room."

"You found it? You stole it, you mean?" said Brent rather harshly. And then his sense of humor pricking at him again, he remembered that he himself had stolen it from Fritz and that Charles Sanderson had stolen it from the Admiralty.

"Everything's fair in love and war," defended Molly, "and this is both love and war."

"'Diamond, Diamond, what hast thou done?'" quoted Brent half to himself. "How do you know anything about it?" he added.

"I saw Mrs. Lee slipping a paper into her handkerchief sachet as I was passing her room on my way to dress for dinner. I shouldn't have thought anything of it, although there was something odd about the way she took it out of her dress and slipped it into the lining of the sachet, but when father told me about Mr. Sanderson's loss I wondered if perhaps this had anything to do with it, so I ran up—and stole it, as you say."

"I see. You say everything's fair in love and war, Molly. Nearly everything's fair in war, though not quite all, by a long chalk, but the same principle doesn't apply to love. You can't be too scrupulous about that, because the thing ceases to be worth having if you tamper too much with the methods. Tell me, did you get this map in a burst of patriotic fervor, because you felt Mrs. Lee was a German spy; or did you want it because you thought all was not right between Mrs. Lee and myself, and wished to knock her down and out?"

"A little of both, I think," said Molly

slowly, "but more of the second. Yes, I don't care if it is wrong, Chris. And it was most of all because I wanted to save you, that was why I didn't mind what I did."

"Molly, you are an angel and I love you for it. But believe me when I tell you one can't be too scrupulous in love, just as one can be too scrupulous in war. You know I mean what I'm saying, don't you?"

"Yes, I'm sure you do, Chris."

"Very well, then. It follows that I am not doing anything unworthy of our love, and that whatever I can't tell you has to do with something else. If there is anything about me that you find it hard to explain, Molly, it isn't on the personal side at all, remember."

"But it is so hard," said Molly plaintively. "If you love me there shouldn't be anything that you can't tell me about."

"Dear little goose, there are dozens of things I wouldn't ever tell you about. But this secret isn't my own to tell you, yet."

"Then it must be more to you than your love for me," said Molly.

"In a way, yes."

"Oh!" cried Molly, drawing away from him with a stricken look in her eyes.

"Dearest, there is one thing that does mat-

ter more than love. That is to say, it matters more than anything personal. No personal thing could matter more than love, of course."

"What is this thing that's so valuable?" demanded Molly.

"It's an idea, just an idea, that's all."

"An idea?" echoed Molly.

"Yes. It may be work, or what people call honor—and honor leads one into strange places sometimes. But it's just an idea—or an ideal, if you prefer it. Something in the mind, and everything has to give way to it. . . . Ideas are more important than anything personal, Molly. That's what you haven't found out."

Molly sat looking up at him in silence. This was surely not the Chris she had known, her gay lover Chris, who had always laughed and joked with her and seemed too *blasé* and indifferent to the rest of the world. He looked very grave, almost stern, and yet something in his eyes told her he was being fond of her exactly the same as ever. Could he possibly talk like that if he were a German spy, she wondered. He had not been able to bring a single proof of his innocence, he had not attempted to. Well, unless he were

the most consummate hypocrite—was he?—after all, he had lied to her about Mrs. Lee all day, but then he had lied badly, she had known there was something behind it. . . .

Chris took the map gently from her lax fingers.

"Shall we say no more about it until to-morrow, Molly?" he asked. "Meanwhile, I'll take charge of this. You don't know what fire you have been playing with, my dear."

All Molly's suspicions came surging back at her, but not personal suspicions this time. She had actually forgotten the issues between Mrs. Lee and Brent in the dread lest it were true that Chris was, after all, that most contemptible of beings—a man spying against his own country. She snatched the map back from him.

"Chris, I can't let it go at that; you can't talk me over. Oh, I don't know what to think. I'm so miserable. Do tell me the truth and let me help you. If you don't father——"

"Well, what do you mean, what's he going to do?"

"Oh, you know what he is. He's going straight to the police to have you arrested."

"I say," said Brent thoughtfully, "that

would be awkward. That might have very unpleasant consequences indeed." He kept his hands over hers, which still held the map, and thought rapidly. To tell Molly the truth was out of the question. She was too young, too inexperienced in hiding her feelings for that to be safe. In fact, it would be utterly unjustifiable. Better rupture all his personal relationships than run such a risk. But it was not the breaking of any tie which was worrying Brent now. It was the fact that because of this bold and unforeseen move on the part of the enemy all his plans might come to nothing, the submarine get away, the house be burned. To take Mr. Pollock into his confidence was more impossible than to tell Molly. He might just as well shout his secret from the housetops. He could hardly help smiling as he imagined how Mr. Pollock would think he was behaving as usual to the Sandersons, while all the time the glare of his eye, the purple of his countenance, and his surprise, indignation, and alarm, would be as plain for the Sandersons to read as one of their own ciphers. There was only one chance, and that was to play on Molly's love for him. If he could make her think that he, and he alone, was in the game, she might

shield him, anyway until to-morrow, when all could be made plain. It was unfortunate that he had been trying to teach her the sacredness of an idea over any individual tie, and he could only hope that her instinct would triumph over counsel so alien to her habit of mind and so newly administered.

"Have you said anything to Mrs. Lee, Molly?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Then you mustn't. I'll tell you why. I gave that paper to Mrs. Lee. I thought I or my room might be searched."

Molly gave a little cry and snatched her hands from under his. "You gave it to her knowing what it was?"

"Knowing what it was. She, of course, is quite ignorant about it. I just asked her to take charge of it for me."

Molly sat looking at him with all the pretty color vanished from her face. At last the truth of his teaching had penetrated to her brain. She had told her father and Pennicuik only that afternoon that however much in the wrong Chris might prove to be, she would only love him all the more. Now she knew it was not true, that there are some things which love cannot survive, because

they destroy the very essence of the person who was loved. She realized now that she had worshiped Chris because he had always seemed to her above every other man she had met. Now he was immeasurably lower than her absurd, pompous, but honest father, lower than Percy with his nice, ordinary, well-meaning nature. In a flash she saw that she would have preferred even an intrigue with Mrs. Lee to this.

Brent saw, and in that moment of comprehension, although it made his task more difficult, he realized that unknown to itself and to him until now, Molly's spirit was, after all, akin to his. She, too, could prefer personal unhappiness to the loss of an idea.

Molly cried convulsively, leaning over the arm of the chair farthest away from him. He could not attempt to comfort her. He remained silent. Suddenly through the horror in Molly's mind a sudden flash of inspiration came.

Why, how silly she had been to imagine that this terrible thing Chris said of himself could be true. There could be only one reason for his saying it: the old conventional man's reason. He was doing it to shield a woman, to shield Mrs. Lee. She whirled

round, and catching him by the shoulders looked into his eyes.

"Chris, I don't believe a word of it," she declared. "You are not telling me the truth. You're saying this to shield her. I'm just beginning to understand. How long have you known Mrs. Lee?"

At that moment the door opened and Miriam came into the room.

CHAPTER XIV

MIRIAM had heard Molly's last words by the simple expedient of listening at the door. This was one of the disadvantages of her profession—that, instinctively, she now always applied her ear to the crack of a door before putting her fingers to the handle. She now saw, as she thought, that Molly was making a scene about her, Miriam's, behavior with Brent, and anxious to help him, lest jealousy should set fire to their mine, she came to the rescue.

"Are you talking about me?" she asked casually and with her charming, friendly smile.

Molly made no attempt to tidy the disordered hair she had pushed back from her forehead or to dry her wet cheeks. She just sat looking up at the other woman.

"Yes," she answered, "I was asking Mr. Brent to tell me truthfully exactly how long he had known you."

Brent tried to signal Miriam with his eyes not to keep to their original story of only

having met the day before, but Miriam not unnaturally took him to be imploring her to help to back him up in it.

"I can answer that," she said gayly. "Let's see, now," and she began to count on her fingers. "One, two, three, four, five, six, yes, twenty-four hours."

"That's not true," said Molly.

"Oh," said Miriam, at a loss, and flashing an anxious look at Brent. "What is it? Is anything the matter?"

"A good deal's the matter," replied Brent. "Mr. Sanderson's lost some valuable papers and they have been traced to one of us."

"They were found in your room," Molly told her.

"Yes," countered Brent quickly, "they were those I gave you."

Miriam, as Chris had done a few minutes earlier, thought over the situation swiftly and in silence. Even more than he, she cared nothing for the personal issue, since she had nothing to lose in that respect, except a temporary diminution in the regard of some people she hardly knew and did not care about. Brent's was the master mind in their schemes. It was of vital importance, then, to keep him free to continue them, and she saw

her way at the same time toward clearing matters for him and Molly. She gave a little hard laugh, and so completely was her outward semblance in training and at the command of her mind, that, with that swift decision, she became to all appearances a complete adventuress.

Brent marveled as he watched her. Here was a department in which Miriam was ahead of him; there was no flaw in her acting.

"I see," remarked Miriam, "and you," turning to Brent, "you dear, chivalrous person, you let it be thought that you have stolen them." Her eyes signaled to him and he saw her game. It was, he knew, the only one to save the situation, and though hating himself for the necessity, he reluctantly followed her lead. It was not very difficult, under the circumstances, for him to look down and appear embarrassed.

"How perfectly delicious of you!" continued Miriam, "and how exactly like you! Who says that chivalry is dead?"

Molly looked straight at her.

"Mr. Brent has just told me," she said, "that he took the papers, and that he gave them to you, and you had no idea at all what they were."

"Yes, I'll bet he has," replied Miriam, strolling slowly across the room so that the gold threads woven in her dress caught the light now here, now there, and gave an impression of undulation which helped her effect immensely and gave the true snaky touch.

"What do you mean?" demanded Molly. "Why do you talk of him like that? You speak as though he *belonged* to you."

Brent began to feel supremely ridiculous, as a man always must when he is the object of contention between two women. Reverse the situation and the woman is an object of admiration, both to herself and the two men. But for some strange, far-back, biological reason, the same does not hold true of the position in which Christopher Brent now found himself. He was what he looked, supremely uncomfortable, and for the first time his foolish expression ceased to be assumed and became the genuine article.

"Molly!" he protested angrily.

"Please go on," said Miriam to her, taking no heed of him.

"I am going on," said Molly. "I want to know what it all means. I want to know what Chris is to you."

"One of my very oldest friends," replied Miriam calmly.

"Chris! And you told me that you had never met Mrs. Lee before."

"He told you that because I asked him to."

"I was speaking to you, Chris," went on Molly. "Can't you answer for yourself?"

"I shouldn't advise it," suggested Miriam, "if you want to hear the truth."

"You mean he'd lie to me? I don't believe he would, not now. Would you still lie, Chris?"

"I—I——" began Brent. "Of course I wouldn't."

"He's lying now," remarked Miriam, in an amused voice. "Your fiancé, Miss Pollock, is one of those men who would commit almost any crime sooner than give a woman away. They call that the one unpardonable sin. Funny, isn't it? And rather rare, but I don't know where women like me would be without them."

"You've got Chris in your power," persisted Molly, sticking to her phrase.

Miriam shrugged her shoulders. "A little, perhaps; a very little. When you have grown to know as much of the world as I do, Miss Pollock, you will realize that any

woman can get a man into her power so long as she can make him feel sorry for her."

"I don't understand," replied Molly stiffly.

"Very well, then I will try to explain. It was in South Africa that I first met Mr. Brent."

"Ah, so it wasn't only your husband?" cried Molly. "Chris told me that he had met your husband there."

"But not a word about me?" asked Miriam.

"No."

"You are a brick, Kit," remarked Miriam, flashing a smile at him. "Well, Miss Pollock, I was married to a farmer in Rhodesia. I need not bore you with details. He was just the worst kind of brute, that's all; and even to think of my married life makes me go cold. Well, Mr. Brent came along and was sorry for me. He gave me money so that I could run away. He got me work in Cape Town. That didn't satisfy me. I was ambitious, I wanted to be rich. I wanted to live, really live, after all those wasted years in Rhodesia. I didn't want anything more to do with men, though, you needn't think

that. I had enough of that side of life with my husband. But I wanted excitement, something to fill my life, something that would pay well. This opportunity came. My country was nothing in particular to me. I took the job on. Well, I wanted a dupe, an unconscious assistant——" She paused a moment. "I hope you won't mind what I am going to say, Kit, but I couldn't help thinking of you. You looked the part so well," and she gave a little ripple of laughter which struck Molly as being peculiarly heartless under the circumstances. "I just made use of him," Miriam explained, "it was so easy. He asked no questions, he just believed in me."

"And if it hadn't been for me," said Molly slowly, "you would have gone on using him."

"I suppose so," the other agreed pleasantly.

Molly's feminine mind had seen a flaw in the argument and she fixed on it.

"But if you are all you say, since he was ready to take your guilt on himself, why didn't you let him?" she demanded; "if there is really nothing more than just friendship between you."

"Because it wouldn't have saved me," replied Miriam frankly. "Otherwise——" and she gave an expressive little gesture with her hands.

"I think you must be the wickedest woman in the world," said Molly passionately.

"No, no, Molly," cried Brent, "you don't understand——"

"Chris, you still defend her after what she's said?"

"Please don't be cross with him," asked Miriam sweetly. "I think it's really rather beautiful. Well, Miss Pollock, hadn't you better tell Mr. Sanderson that you have found the spy and that she's quite willing to confess to him?"

Molly looked from one to the other of them in miserable perplexity.

"You come with me, Chris," she suggested.

"Oh, no, you mustn't leave the spy alone," put in Miriam. "Suppose I were to escape. What would Mr. Sanderson say then?"

"Shall I go, Chris?" asked Molly.

He had turned away from the two women and was standing with his elbows on the mantelpiece and his head in his hands.

"Yes, go, dear; I suppose you had better,"

he said in a low voice; "there is nothing more to be said."

Molly again glanced from one to the other, then went silently out of the room, leaving them together.

CHAPTER XV

As the door closed Brent swung round and faced Miriam.

"Good Lord, what a horrible situation!" he said violently. "Miriam, what have you done?"

"The only thing that could be done. If they had taken you away what would have happened to us all to-night? You see, I remembered that Pollock's a magistrate and that he'd have you arrested on suspicion. He doesn't love you as it is, if you'll excuse my mentioning it, Kit. You would not have been able to see the authorities and get at anything before morning, and then it would have been to late."

"It's going to be damnably unpleasant for you," grumbled Brent.

Miriam came swiftly toward him, glancing at the door as she did so. "I don't think so, Kit. I've got an idea. Didn't you tell me once that the German system is so arranged that one spy may meet another and have no idea of it?"

"Yes, that's true, but what's that got to do with it?"

"It's all I wanted to know, thanks," said Miriam, laughing.

"What's your idea? Tell me, Miriam."

"Never you mind. It's my own little ewe lamb of an idea. But tell me, who found the plan in my room?"

"Does that matter now? It's been found, that's the chief thing." Chris looked away from her and played with an ornament on the mantelpiece.

"I want to know, please, Kit. I have a right to be told."

"You certainly have, that's a sure thing," he conceded. "Well, it was Molly."

Miriam slowly nodded her head. "I thought so, Kit. I'd sooner be up against any antagonist in the world than a girl in love. There's nothing she sticks at."

"What beats me," grumbled Christopher, "is why you left the plan about. Why didn't you lock it up?"

"Well, experience has taught me that the best way to hide a thing is to leave it about. I knew there was a risk of suspicion this evening, and thought it quite likely that while we were at dinner they would be hunting

through my boxes. It goes without saying that they would have means of opening any lock, and if the worst came to the worst and I had been searched and the thing had been found on me all would have been over. But the lining of my handkerchief sachet, right in the heart of the cotton-wool padding, ought to have been the safest place in the world. Would have been, too, but for the pure accident of my door swinging open and Molly seeing me. It only shows how one should always take the element of chance into account."

"What a time that fellow Sanderson is coming!" commented Brent nervously. "Upon my word, Miriam, I don't quite like our luck deserting us like this."

"Pull yourself together, Kit, there's nothing to be anxious about now. You have just got to go ahead as though nothing had happened and you don't know what a splendid plan I've got." She gave a little gleeful laugh. "Why, I think this whole disturbance will turn out to be of the greatest value to us. You just wait."

"I wonder what Molly's doing," said Brent half to himself, glancing toward the door. "I can't understand why he doesn't come."

Miriam burst out laughing. "Oh, you goose, I can tell you that," she said. "How silly even the cleverest men are! Do you imagine that, even in the state of mind she was in, Molly would go straight into the billiard-room with her hair all over the place and her face stained by crying? She's gone upstairs to give two dabs with the brush and one with the powder puff. But, talking of a certain gentleman, I think I hear his hoof." She moved quickly away from Brent to the other side of the room, and he stood with his back half turned toward her, his hands in his pockets, looking into the grate with a shamefaced expression.

The door opened and Charles Sanderson came in. He looked straight at Miriam.

"I understand you have something to say to me, Mrs. Lee," he said coldly.

"Yes," she replied, nodding at him. "Leave us together, will you, Kit?"

"Wait a moment, Brent," said Charles. "I understand from Miss Pollock that you have been the cat's-paw in this little affair, and have been trying to shield Mrs. Lee for old acquaintance' sake. Is that so?"

"That's quite true," put in Miriam swiftly.

"Of course, Brent," continued Sanderson, "you, as a mere idler, do not, I suppose, realize the importance of events just now. I hope you have learned that just because you have an admiration for a pretty face you must not go doing anything its owner asks you. Surely even you might have guessed that all was not quite right?"

"I never thought it was anything to do with spies, on my word, Sanderson," replied Chris, with an anxious fatuousness of manner. "I'm devilishly upset about it, I can tell you. I'd always liked Mrs. Lee, she used to be one of my best pals in South Africa. How was I to know?" Brent hated himself as he spoke, but he knew he was doing the only possible thing under the circumstances, and accordingly he did it as well as he knew how.

"Well, see that you are not quite such a fool again," commented Charles, with a not unkindly contempt. "And now, please, if you will leave me to deal with Mrs. Lee."

Chris went toward the door, then paused. "I say, Sanderson," he said earnestly, "you won't be too rough on her, will you?" He stuck his eyeglass in his eye and beamed confidingly through it. "She's an awfully

good sort, she is really. I'd be awfully upset if she was to get into any trouble."

"Oh, get out," said Sanderson.

Chris went.

When they were alone together Sanderson walked very slowly across to where Miriam stood, her head up and her hands lightly clasped behind her. He knew that this woman must be a secret service agent employed by the British Government, but he was not yet aware of exactly how much she knew about him and the rest of the household. It was of vital importance that he should find out. He adopted a tone which, if she still thought him the innocent victim of, say, Fräulein or Fritz, would not give him away.

"So you are the spy, are you?" he asked quietly and with a slight but grim smile playing about his clean-shaven mouth.

"Does it surprise you?" she asked, withholding any clew, while her eyes danced with mischief.

"Not altogether, but—well, I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I don't like fighting against women."

They stood looking at each other, neither giving away the secret of how much he or she knew.

Sanderson found he must bring matters to a head.

"Look here," he began, "let's come to an understanding. I'll make things easy for you if you will be quite square with me."

"What does that mean?" asked Miriam cautiously.

"I have lost, as you must know, other documents," replied Charles with equal caution. "Where are they?"

The time had come for Miriam to play her trump card and she played it. She laughed in his face. "Beyond your reach," she replied triumphantly.

"It remains to be seen," he said a trifle grimly. "Where are they?"

"I'm sorry that I can't give you precise information, but they are on their way to Germany."

Charles took two steps backward and stared at her with his mouth open. Miriam did not give him long to think.

"I knew that Fritz had been given an important letter to post to someone in London. I thought it might be something connected with your Admiralty work, and I used Mr. Brent to get it for me. I told him"—she began to laugh a little—"what do you think

I told him? That Fritz was a German spy. Of course he was only most anxious to help me—thought it most awfully good fun."

"But who the devil are you? What are you?" cried Charles, coming toward her again.

Miriam swept him a deep curtsey of defiance, her black and gold skirts swaying out into a glittering circle about her. "One of the Fatherland's most humble but devoted servants," she said quietly. "The game is up—you'll denounce me, I know. But at least I have been able to do something for Germany."

"But, *mein Gott,*" cried Charles in his excitement, "this is incredible. We are saved, after all."

"We! What do you mean?" asked Miriam, staring at him as though bereft of reason.

"You! Us! Well!" And throwing his head back, Charles laughed aloud in his relief. "Well, I'll be damned!"

CHAPTER XVI

The hour that followed was the most difficult Miriam had ever known. It was one thing to bluff Charles Sanderson for a few successful minutes, it was quite another to keep it up under questions from the rest of the gang as well. She began to realize the truth of what Brent had said, that Fräulein was the leading spirit, and that there was something oddly sinister about this quiet, faded little woman in the brown shawl.

Miriam had several things in her favor. She spoke German, that is, the bastard German chiefly used in South Africa, like a native, and part of her training had been to get as thoroughly conversant as was possible with the pet catch-words and phrases in use amongst the denizens of what may be called the spy world. A curious place this, a kind of mental *demi-monde,* a place where emotion, except for the one great passion which was supposed to focus everything, was discouraged, and where mental effort had to be kept at its brightest and sharpest. To be

plunged into a section of it, as now, gave Miriam a curious feeling of having been dropped on to a planet where the atmosphere differed so from the normal that it was actually hard to breathe. Everything appeared slightly distorted in the minds of these people, like objects seen through deep water; and yet she had to keep all her senses on the alert through the effect as of a damp fogginess which this half-world made upon her.

Charles had brought in all the rest of the gang, excepting Fritz; Mr. Pollock was playing a complicated game of patience in the billiard-room, Chris had disappeared, apparently much discomfited, and as to Molly, she had gone to bed long ago. Miss Myrtle, too, had taken her departure, but not before a curious little incident had occurred which struck a chill to Miriam, knowing what she did.

Miss Myrtle, from whom, of course, all knowledge of events was kept hidden by both sides, came pattering into the sitting-room in search of Fräulein just as the council of war in which Miriam had to play such a difficult part was about to begin. All four conspirators were sitting round the table,

ostensibly playing bridge, so that everything should seem natural to anyone who glanced in.

Miss Myrtle's sandy pompadour and the long face which matched it so ludicrously in tone came sidling round the door somewhat in advance of her thin, hollow-chested figure which was clad in that abomination known as an "evening blouse," made of drab velveteen trimmed with an unfortunate selection of glittering ornaments and surmounting a cashmere skirt of the same hue.

"I've just come in to say good-night," she said in the carefully bright voice that years of governessing had instilled into her.

Mrs. Sanderson checked the annoyed expression which she felt rising to the surface of her countenance and smiled blandly. "You are going off early to-night, Miss Myrtle," she remarked.

"I know, but I need the rest. I am such a light sleeper and I haven't really quite got over my little chill yet. Besides, last night Mr. Brent awakened me when he came upstairs. I'm sure he would be most upset if he knew it, so I haven't said a word, but I didn't get to sleep again for several hours."

Fräulein began a rummage in her black silk bag. She produced a little bottle full of white tablets and then looked up at Miss Myrtle, fixing her steadily with her beady brown eyes. "Shall I give you a little remedy I have, dear Miss Myrtle?" she offered. She held up the bottle. "This, I promise you, will insure sound repose."

Charles Sanderson's face remained quite imperturbable, he looked down and made no movement, as if he waited for fate to take its course, being equally unwilling either to help or hinder it.

But Miriam could hardly repress a quickly indrawn breath of horror, while a slight moisture broke out over Mrs. Sanderson's large and comely face. She half put out her plump hand to arrest Fräulein's.

"Do you think it quite safe to take sleeping draughts, Miss Myrtle?" she asked, and her voice was a little strained and unequal. "Let me send you up some hot milk instead to your room."

"This is not a sleeping draught," replied Fräulein, getting up and shaking two of the little tabloids into Miss Myrtle's palm as she spoke. "This is a mere nothing. It will but insure sound and healthy sleep."

"So very comforting," crooned Miss Myrtle. "I am sure I am most obliged to you, Fräulein. Thank you, and good-night." She gave a little angular inclination of the pompadour to the assembled company and departed, while Charles gravely held the door open for her.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly as he came back to the table and sat down again. "I must say your methods are thorough, Fräulein," he observed. "They are somewhat unpleasant to anyone of a fastidious taste. I don't like them myself, but I don't suppose it would do any good to tell you so. You *would* give it to her and we couldn't stop it, short of a scene."

"Oh, Charles, it's murder," said Mrs. Sanderson half hysterically. "I'm sure we never meant to do any harm to anyone. If only things hadn't gone so wrong to-day."

"You must just look on the thing as purely incidental, mother," replied Charles. "I don't think Miss Myrtle would be much loss to the human race, myself, though I don't think she's worth destroying either."

"Ach, they are all worth destroying," insisted Fräulein. "Every English soul sent below is a meritorious action. Is it not so,

Mrs. Lee? What does our new-found sister say?"

Miriam gave a little laugh that sounded incredibly natural even to her own critical ears.

"I agree with Fräulein and with Mrs. Sanderson too. A Miss Myrtle more or less is no great matter, but still, everyone we make sure of is to the good."

"I think you are all terrible," said Mrs. Sanderson, passing her plump fingers over her eyes. "But I suppose it must be. Our aims are great and glorious; we must remember that, and not notice what dirt there is by the way."

Miriam wondered whether she referred to Miss Myrtle or her own actions as dirt, but needless to remark, did not voice her thought.

"Oh, enough about all that," said Charles, pushing the whole subject of Miss Myrtle aside as of no importance. "We must come to business."

"Ah, yes, business," repeated Fräulein. "As you say, this little episode is purely incidental. The signal is to be given at one o'clock, is it not so?"

"Yes, at one o'clock. I have the incen-

diary bomb ready. It will only be necessary to set it and in a very few seconds after the explosion the whole house will be burning. They are pretty thorough things, you know. But to make doubly sure I shall spray some petrol about at the last moment."

Fräulein nodded her bird-like head approvingly. "All that is good," she remarked, "and now for us, our escape. Have you planned that out?"

"There I can help you," broke in Miriam. "I haven't been working alone down here. Although I wasn't told about all of you, I have two men assistants heart and soul in the cause, who are staying down in the town. They keep a big car in readiness. I only have to telephone them to-night."

"Ah, that's splendid," exclaimed Mrs. Sanderson. "I cannot tell you how I want to get away. Luckily the house is so isolated it will be thoroughly burned out before many people can arrive, let alone the fire engine. How long before are we to start, Charles?"

"Well, I have calculated it out this way, mother. In the excitement of the fire and the finding of the bodies"—Mrs. Sanderson flinched slightly—"it will, I should imagine, be quite twelve hours before these stupid

English realize that we are not amid the ruins. I have all our passports ready and the yacht sails to-morrow morning early. Therefore, if you all get away in this car of Mrs. Lee's about midnight, I shall stay just to set things going and Fritz and I will join you in the two-seater, later, in London. You have all got everything ready, I suppose?"

"Everything," replied Fräulein. "But now there is one thing more which is causing me anxiety. I don't consider that Brent has yet been fully explained."

Miriam's heart gave a great bound, then seemed to stand still. She pressed her hands together under the table in nervous apprehension. Fräulein went on:

"What about the Marconi instrument having been tampered with? That has never been explained. And the shooting of the pigeon, that was a queer coincidence, hein?"

"I can explain the pigeon," said Miriam wearily. "In fact I have already done so. I was teasing Mr. Brent about his shooting and wagered him he couldn't hit a sitting gull. Owing to this system of ignorance we are all kept in, I of course thought that you were using your pigeons in the service of

the Admiralty. I knew when I saw one rising that it must be being sent on some message of importance. The rest you know. I had my little dummy package prepared and managed to change it when we were all looking at the dead bird afterward. Even when I saw what the map was, it did not convey the truth to me, for of course I only thought it was a plan that Mr. Sanderson had to get to the Admiralty as quickly as possible. My one aim was to get it to Germany as quickly as possible, but all we can do now is to take it ourselves."

"You have it?" asked Sanderson.

She nodded. "Yes, I still have it."

"That's all right, then; but as you say, Fräulein, the tampering with the Marconi installation remains unexplained."

"I suppose none of you know," broke in Miriam, speaking quite casually, "that young Pennicuik had a course in wireless training? And he was in and out a good deal this morning, you know. It's no good saying he hasn't the brains, Fräulein, because that's what we've each and all thought of everybody in this house. Somebody obviously had the brains, and it seems to me that everything points to Mr. Pennicuik."

"Ah, but that puts quite a different light on it," exclaimed Fräulein, "if Mr. Pennicuik has had experience in wireless. He is not, as you say, the type that we should use for investigation work, but then the English must use what they have, and he is a very typical Englishman. They have a curious way, these apparently commonplace young men, of getting a lot more done than anyone would ever suspect."

"Well, Pennicuik's time is up, anyway," remarked Charles grimly. "His career is going to be nipped in the bud to-night. I think it certainly must have been Pennicuik; as you say, Mrs. Lee, he was the only person as far as we know with both the knowledge and the opportunity."

"Goodness knows," said Fräulein, "a fuss of any kind is the last thing we want to-night, so it will be better to let Brent alone. Pennicuik, yes, that has certainly thrown a new light on things."

Mrs. Sanderson glanced at her watch. "In a few minutes more this young Pennicuik will be in for that whiskey-and-soda," she warned them. "It won't be long before he has to go on guard."

"Everything is settled, then?" said Fräu-

lein briskly. "You," to Mrs. Lee, "will see about the car and our escape. And you, Charles, will see to the bomb, and your mother and I will attend to getting everything together. I think it is time we women appeared to go to bed." She rose as she spoke and the other two followed her example, Miriam with a deeply thankful heart.

She was still very anxious lest something should miscarry, and she knew it would be unsafe to try to communicate with Brent in any way. She could only do as he asked her —go to her room and wait until her share in the proceedings began.

CHAPTER XVII

A LITTLE later Percival Pennicuik, quite unconscious of how often his name had been taken, though not in vain, and of the fate which was threatening him, sat comfortably in the largest armchair in the Sandersons' sitting-room, drinking his whiskey-and-soda. The room looked very cozy and bright and to Brent's imagination seemed extraordinarily and inanely unaware that it might be going to be burnt to cinders. He looked round it half unbelievingly, unable to rid himself of the queer fancy that inanimate objects should surely hold some prescience of an event so near and devastating.

Outwardly he himself looked the image of crestfallen fatuity. Mr. Pollock, on the contrary, who was also imbibing whiskey-and-soda, beamed with importance and gratification.

"So Brent's had a lesson not to trust in appearances," he finished, having told Pennicuik the tale of the unmasking of Mrs. Lee.

"She had you all right, Brent. Very clever the way she played you up, very clever."

"I say, you know," said Chris, "it has bowled me out. I never felt such an almighty ass in my life."

"What are they going to do with her?" asked Pennicuik.

"I don't think they have decided at present. Sanderson seems inclined to hush the matter up. Very awkward, you know, a woman and all that sort of thing." And Mr. Pollock wagged his head sagely.

"That's all very well," replied Pennicuik, with the uncompromising virtue of youth, "but if she's let off, what's to prevent her playing exactly the same game anywhere else? Sanderson's all right. He's got his papers back, she can't do any more damage down here, but there are others to be thought of. One can't afford to be chivalrous in a case of this sort, there's too much at stake; for the sake of sparing one woman you might sacrifice the lives of a thousand men." He spoke with, for him, unusual fluency. Percy belonged to the inarticulate class of Englishman—a class largely in the majority, but he too had felt something of the quickening effect of the day's events. This capture of the spy was the nearest to real war he had

yet come; the thought of it gave quite a tang of excitement to his dull vigil on the cliff.

"Dear me, I think you are putting it a little strongly, Pennicuik, my boy. At the same time it must be admitted there is a lot in what you say. Evidently you are not the one to be carried away by a pretty face and a pleasant manner. He's the sort of man we want, eh, Brent?"

"Go on, rub it in, as though I weren't feeling quite enough of a bally ass without that," lamented Chris.

"Well, well, Brent," said Mr. Pollock, "I'm very glad to find it was only foolishness on your part and that I was mistaken about the other thing, you know." He glanced at his aggressively handsome watch as he spoke. "Bless my soul," he went on, "it's half-past eleven. I must be off. Early to bed, et cetera, that's always been my motto. Can't say I'm particularly wealthy, but I think I can claim the healthy and wise. Yes, I think I can claim that much. The Sandersons were jolly glad to have me to advise them, I can tell you. . . ." All this on an almost boisterous note of cheeriness as he shook hands. "Good-night, Percy, my boy. Hope you have got a good thick coat with

you. You'll find it a bit chilly on the cliff, mind you."

"Oh, I shall be all right, sir, thanks," said Pennicuik, shaking hands. "Good-night."

Mr. Pollock proceeded to shake hands solemnly with Brent as an *amende honorable* and bade him also good-night more or less amiably.

Brent waited till the door had shut behind the portly figure, and then going quickly toward it, turned the key in the lock. Pennicuik swung round on him in amazement.

"I say, what the dickens are you doing?" he asked.

"Listen to me, Pennicuik," replied Brent, speaking rapidly but very low, and in a voice whose incisive determination caused Pennicuik to open his eyes and mouth. "You want to know why I locked that door. I'm just going to tell you. Listen carefully, for we haven't much time. Do you know anything about wireless telegraphy?"

Pennicuik, who was blissfully ignorant of the knowledge with which Miriam had pretended to credit him, shook his head.

"No, but what——" he began.

"Don't interrupt. You have read, of course, of the use the German spies are mak-

ing of Marconi installations in this country?"

"Yes."

"You know, too, that they are up to all sorts of dodges to conceal it?"

"Yes."

"Ever see one of them?"

Pennicuik shook his head in bewilderment.

"Well, you shall now," and Brent crossed over to the fireplace and with his quick, sensitive fingers felt about for the spring. Slowly the grate revolved and the mutilated Marconi apparatus swung into view, glittering and compact.

Pennicuik had stood up and was staring at the thing with distended eyes. He had an absurdly embarrassed feeling as though a miracle had suddenly happened and he was forced to believe it in front of everybody.

"Good Lord," he ejaculated at last. "Have you told Sanderson about this?"

"There's no need, he knows all about it. It's his."

A look of relief oddly mingled with disappointment swept across Pennicuik's ingenuous countenance. "Oh, I see, it's an Admiralty show."

"It's nothing of the kind."

"But, good heavens, you don't mean——"

"I do indeed. Charles Sanderson is a German spy, his real name is von Mantel, son of the late General. His mother is also a German spy and is the widow of von Mantel. Fritz and Fräulein Schroeder complete the little surprise packet. The only one to be really afraid of is the Fräulein, and she's deadly."

Pennicuik, with the instinctive gesture of the Englishman, picked up his glass and drank off nearly all his whiskey-and-soda. This proceeding cleared his brain and he gazed across at Brent with a new wonder in his eyes.

"Then you?" he asked.

"I'm on their track. It's my job," replied Brent, swinging the grate back to its ordinary position again.

"What about Mrs. Lee?" asked the bewildered Percy.

"She's just bluffing. She's my assistant. Look here, you had better satisfy yourself that all is in order; just run your eye over these," and taking some official-looking documents from an inner pocket, Brent passed them over to the astonished young man, who sat down and began studying them.

Brent went over to the door and unlocked it, then waited till Pennicuik's slower intelligence should have taken in the contents of the papers. Pennicuik looked up from them with a little gasp. He no longer spoke to Brent with the half-ragging, half-contemptuous earlier tone, not even with the free comradeship of a man speaking to his equal. This lean, *blasé* individual with the eyeglass, who usually looked so bored, and now seemed all tense decision, was both his superior officer and his superior as a man, and he knew it.

He got up and handed the papers back. "By Jove, sir," he stammered, "I'd no idea. I must have been making an awful fool of myself to you. Wondering why you didn't enlist and all that."

"Of course you'd no idea," cut in Brent. "If you had, it would have shown I didn't know my business. Now, look here, Pennicuik, we're up against a very tough lot. There are big things going to be done to-night; are you prepared to help?"

"You just give me the chance, that's all, sir."

"Well, listen. The Sandersons have arranged to burn this house to-night as a sig-

nal to German submarines out in the harbor."

Pennicuik gave vent to a low whistle of dismay.

"You needn't worry," Brent reassured him with a laugh. "They won't manage it, but I shall."

"You will burn the house?" asked the amazed young man.

"No, no. I'll send a signal, not to the German submarines, though, but to a couple of British cruisers which will be waiting in the harbor for them."

"By Jove, that's great," cried Pennicuik, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm and enjoyment. At last the war was becoming real to him, which, in spite of his patriotism, his uniform, and the military routine, it had not yet done.

To most people in England, unaffected as they are by the actual horrors owing to a purely geographical accident, the war seems more in the nature of a malign nightmare than anything else. Pennicuik, like every other Englishman, had never been able quite to get rid of the feeling that he was making rather an ass of himself when he talked of spies, signals, documents, and all the rest of the

well-worn paraphernalia associated for so many years with pure melodrama. Now, as though at the touch of a wand, the whole thing had sprung into reality and Pennicuik tingled to the knowledge.

"Have they taught you the semaphore?" asked Brent.

"More or less, sir."

"What's this?" asked Brent, rapidly signaling a word.

Pennicuik shook his head. "You go a bit too quick for me, sir."

"Right, I'll try again. Got it this time?"

"I think so. Britannia, wasn't it?"

Brent nodded. "You're all right. That'll do. In half an hour or less you will see somebody signaling at this window, with lights, of course. Don't worry. You'll know it's me signaling to the cruisers."

"Right, sir; is there anything else? It's nearly time for me to relieve the sentry."

Chris smiled with a touch of grimness.

"Anything else? It's really rather funny you should ask that; I should just think there was. You're not keen to become a corpse yet awhile, I suppose?"

"Well, not exactly—can't say that I am."

"If the Sandersons' plan had succeeded," remarked Chris quietly, "you'd have had no option."

This was bringing the war home with a vengeance. Pennicuik stared at Brent, hardly able to believe him.

"Good God, sir, you are joking; you don't mean——"

"They were worried about you," replied Chris. "From your place on the cliff you might very easily have seen the flame and given the alarm before the house was properly alight. That would not have suited their book at all. So it was arranged that Fritz should—make sure of your silence. A little effort with a knife, I take it."

"Murder, sheer murder," gasped Percy.

"They will still attempt it," went on Chris, "so you must keep your eyes open and if anybody fails to answer your challenge you must shoot, and shoot to kill. You are a crack shot, they tell me."

Pennicuik turned to go, then came back. "Look here, sir, I simply don't know how to thank you," he said awkwardly.

"Don't thank me; you run along to your place and see that you keep your eyes and ears well open, and good luck to you."

"Good luck to you, sir," and Pennicuik saluted before he went out at the window.

Chris stood still for a moment. He began to search in his pockets, then a look of satisfaction came over his face as his fingers touched what they sought. He drew out his pipe, filled it with care, lit it, and drew two or three puffs with deep contentment. Then, pipe in mouth, he went round the room switching off the lights and went out, shutting the door after him.

CHAPTER XVIII

The whole household had apparently gone to bed. Only a few lights showed in the top-story windows. Presently a faint gleam sprang to life in the sitting-room. It was very faint, for it only came from the small electric movable lamp which stood on a side table. It was turned up by Charles Sanderson. He was accompanied by Fritz, who was carrying a small black box. "Put it down carefully on the table and see that the curtains are drawn across the window," Charles ordered him. Then when Fritz had obeyed, "Are they all in bed?"

"Every vone," Fritz assured him.

"Good. How about this fellow on the cliffs? It's our danger spot in more ways than one. You think you can make quite sure of him? There must be no bungling, mind."

A slow smile spread over Fritz's cherubic countenance, and there came a gleam that was not pleasant into his usually bland little eyes. Again he made that gesture with his phenomenally long thumb. "I vill make no

mistake," he said. "When I lived on my father's farm I used always to kill the peegs. How then should I not know how to kill this peeg?"

"No noise, mind," warned Charles. "Pigs are apt to squeal, you know."

Fritz permitted himself a slight laugh. "This one vill not squeal, he vill no time have. Just dat," and he stabbed the air with his thumb.

Charles nodded. "That's right. Are the others ready?"

"I tink so, sir. I tink I hear them coming."

Charles switched off the light so that when the door opened the shapes of Mrs. Sanderson and Fräulein muffled in big coats and veils could be very dimly seen against the faint light in the passage.

"I don't think he's here," said Mrs. Sanderson, and in the darkness all the nervousness and anxiety in her voice sounded painfully distinct.

"I expect he is," said Fraulein placidly. "Charles, you are there, are you not?"

"I'm here all right. Come in and shut the door and I'll switch on the light again."

"What a start you gave me, Charles!"

murmured Mrs. Sanderson, and she sat down rather heavily in the armchair. The light revealed her face as blotchy, not with terror, for of personal courage she had all that was required by her calling, but with some inner fear of the soul which was making itself felt now.

"Sorry, mater," replied Charles, "but one has to be careful. I thought it might be someone else. Is everything ready?"

Fräulein nodded. "Everything. Not one item has been left to chance, and everything is fitting in perfectly."

"Where is Mrs. Lee?"

"She is in the car waiting for us at the bend of the drive. She has been too wonderful, this new sister of ours. So full of thought, so quick. The escort is there and armed. They leave us in London, but she comes on with us. She has all her papers made out as an American. Is not that clever, hein?"

"Everything seems to be going all right, certainly," agreed Charles. Even his impassive face was showing signs of strain. "Don't touch that," he added hastily, as Fräulein put out her hand curiously toward the little box on the table.

"That's it, then?" she asked. "The incendiary bomb you were telling us about?"

"That's it. It isn't set yet. I shall time it to explode before I join you. Fritz, get the glasses out and the wine."

A little hush fell upon the assembled company, a hush with something solemn in it. Fritz went to the cupboard, unlocked it and took out three glasses and a decanter which he placed upon the table. Charles poured the wine out, still in that silence, then motioned to Fritz to bring a fourth glass for himself. The man obeyed, and then all four standing with their faces toward the east—toward Prussia, and not the place of the Resurrection—they drank the solemn toast. There was something in their silence, in the simplicity of the act, in the significance which the drinking of wine has had from the earliest ages, that for the moment imparted to them a hint of something not altogether unsublime.

The act over, Charles became business-like again. He looked at his watch. "Now it's time you went and left me to my share of the work. If all goes well, and there is no reason why it should not, I shall be with you in about half an hour."

Mrs. Sanderson went up to him, and drawing his head down, kissed him with quiet fervor upon the forehead. "*Auf wiedersehen,* my son," she murmured. "I go, but the good God be with you."

She looked round the room which had been familiar to her for so many years, with its white paint, its innocuous-looking pictures, its harmless ornaments, and its pretty, restful color scheme. She looked, too, at the grate which had held such a secret potency. However impersonal the focus of a woman's life may be, as is so often the case nowadays, she is bound to entwine certain strong personal fibers about it, and notwithstanding the fact that Wave Crest had been to Mrs. Sanderson chiefly the strategic point from which she and her son worked for the cause, yet it had meant home to her too. Unlike Fräulein, who had all her twenty years looked on herself as a stranger and an exile, Mrs. Sanderson had grown gradually more accustomed to her surroundings, probably because the house was her own, whereas Fräulein had merely lived about in other people's families. Therefore, now, happy as she was at the thought of getting back to Germany, and the rewards and honors that would accrue to her for her

work, and conscious of a long and arduous duty well performed, Mrs. Sanderson still felt a natural woman's pang of regret at the destruction of what had been her home for so long. It was a sentiment, she knew, with which none of the others would sympathize, and she therefore kept it to herself, though her haggard glance betrayed itself to Fräulein.

"The little Minna is feeling some regrets," said Fräulein harshly. "Bah, what does it all matter, *meine Kamaradin?* In Germany you will have a better home than this with windows that shut properly and big stoves. Now, now, you need not embrace Charles again, we shall see him within half an hour," and Fräulein with firm fingers swathed Mrs. Sanderson's motor veils once more about her face and pulled down the brown gauze monstrosity which hid her own features. Then the two women went slowly down the passage and Charles turned to Fritz. "You had better be getting your things finished," he advised, "and then do your bit of work. It doesn't matter how we hurry the thing on now."

Again the slow smile beamed out over Fritz's face.

"Peeg-sticking," he murmured blissfully.

"I go peeg-sticking," and he too went, after one last affectionate glance at the little box upon the table.

Left alone, Charles glanced once more at his watch, then switching out the light, drew back the window curtains and, taking his binoculars from a drawer, stood for a moment looking out. All was quite quiet. The night was very dark, but not entirely so, as the moon was in its first quarter, just diffusing a faint grayness behind any densely black object.

Charles opened the window and stood listening. Not a sound broke the stillness except the very faint, far-off rustling of the sea. He stepped back into the room and listened there. It seemed to him that he heard a soft, a very soft step, coming along the corridor. Quickly he pulled the window to, and crossing the room hid himself behind the book-case, from which he could command a view of the room. His finely trained ear had not deceived him; the next moment the door was gently opened and Christopher Brent, in pajamas and dressing-gown, came into the room holding a pocket electric torch in his hand. He flashed the light round, its rays sweeping over the carpet just by San-

derson's feet, but the wing of shadow thrown by the book-case protected him.

Brent went to the window, and taking another electric torch out of his pocket proceeded to send a swift message out into the darkness. It gave really a charming effect as the bright spots of electricity were twirled this way and that, making an interweaving pattern of beams lost as soon as made, as though some tragic web were being woven on an invisible loom. But Charles Sanderson was decidedly not in the mood for admiring artistic effects, and thus it came about that the electric light was suddenly switched up behind Chris and he turned to find himself faced by Sanderson's revolver.

CHAPTER XIX

"HANDS up!" commanded Charles in the best Wild-and-Woolly-West manner.

"Good Lord, Sanderson, how you startled me!" And Chris with a smile of relief let his hands, which still held the electric torches and which he had instinctively thrown up above his head, drop again.

"Keep them up, damn you, or you're a dead man."

Chris stared at him, but though his grin broadened he obeyed.

"Dash it all, Sanderson, aren't you carrying this joke a little too far?" he protested.

"Do as you're told, you swine," was Sanderson's impolite rejoinder, forcibly delivered. "So you're the spy, after all?"

Brent wagged his head at him knowingly. "Oh no, you don't," he said. "I've been had with that once to-day already," and his hands began to drop again.

"Keep them up. That sort of monkeying may be very clever, but it's no use to you now, my friend. Tell me at once, what were you up to?"

"Well, I wish you'd let me put these bally torches down first," said Brent plaintively. "I'm getting most horribly cramped."

"Put them down here," ordered Sanderson, touching the table with the muzzle of his revolver.

"Thanks," said Brent more cheerfully as he laid them down, "thanks awfully. Oof, it's devilish cold in this kit," and he made as though to plunge his hands into the pockets of his dressing-gown.

"Put them up." This in a kind of suppressed yell from Sanderson. "Put them up and keep them up, or I'll let a hole through you in another minute."

"Look here, I'm sick of these Swedish exercises," protested Chris. "Oh, all right, have it your own way," and he once more stood in the prescribed attitude.

"Now then," went on Charles. "We'll have it out. What were you signaling for?"

A beam of gratified pride shone over Brent's face. He gave a little chuckle. "Signaling? Did even you think I was signaling? By George! That's good."

Charles, too, smiled, but a little wearily. "It's not a bit of use trying to fool me, my friend," he advised.

"But I have fooled you," crowed Chris. "By gad, it's a bit of a score, taking you in as well."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Look here, I'll tell you all about it, but do let me put my hands down. I shall get heart disease if you aren't careful, I shall really. It's a great strain having to hold one's arms up above one's head like this."

"Oh, all right, but keep them away from your pockets. Now, out with it."

"Well," began Brent confidentially, "you swear you won't say anything about it at breakfast?"

"Good Lord, are you a fool or mad?" cried Charles irritably. "No, I won't say anything about it at breakfast. Now go on."

"You know young Pennicuik's out on the cliff there? Well, he was bragging to-day about signaling and I said I didn't believe he had had time to get the subject up, and so to prove it I have just sent him a——"

"Message," interrupted Sanderson, "you understand it, then?"

"Of course I don't. That's just where the joke comes in," explained the delighted Brent. "I only know the first seven letters.

I've sent him a spoof signal, but I'll bet you what you like he'll pretend to-morrow that he understood it." Brent's manner was perfect. His story hung together well and Sanderson felt at a loss what to believe.

"So that's the explanation, is it?" he asked. "Well, if I were you I'd think twice before I played that silly trick again. In times like this it's liable to be misunderstood. It's damned dangerous, in fact."

"Dangerous?" Brent's face sobered considerably. "How?"

"Because I should have been quite within my duty if I'd shot you straight off without questioning you. It's a punishable offense to send signals at night nowadays. That's why."

"By Jove, I suppose it is. But I say, Sanderson, what the blazes are you doing with that revolver? You seem to have it uncommonly handy, don't you?"

"My good Brent, in my work I have to guard myself against all emergencies," replied Charles a trifle stiffly.

"But I'm not an emergency," said the ingenuous Chris plaintively.

"Perhaps not," began Charles, but was interrupted by Brent, who, apparently diverted

by catching sight of the box on the table, was moving toward it.

"Hallo," he asked, "what's that?"

"Keep off it," cried Charles quickly. "That, Brent," he went on in an impressive manner, "is the reason why I am armed."

"The reason why you are armed?" Chris looked in bewilderment from the little box to Sanderson and back again. He then raised the eyeglass which was still suspended round his neck and screwed it into his eye for a better survey.

"It isn't the first time," Charles informed him, "that one of these devilish contrivances has found its way into this house."

"Devilish contrivances? What in Heaven's name are you talking about? That little box looks very harmless and well-meaning."

"So do you, for that matter," commented Charles, not without grimness. "My dear Brent, the safety of this house has been threatened by an unknown hand. There's an infernal machine in this box."

"Good God, you don't say so!" Chris backed away from the table, but Sanderson went toward it and lifted the lid of the box.

"Come and look for yourself," he invited the trembling young man.

"Oh, no, not for the world. For God's sake be careful, Sanderson. The damn thing would go off and blow me into smithereens."

At that moment a miracle seemed to take place in the dimly lit room. It became filled with white light, stronger than sunlight, far more glaring. For one second this fierce whiteness held the air, then swept on as though right through the walls themselves, and the two men were left staring at each other in a room that seemed suddenly to have had all the light wiped out of it.

Brent knew the game was up so far as he was concerned, but he made his effort all the same.

"By Jove, that's a fine rocket! Do you suppose there's a ship in distress?" he asked with, for him, a gleeful excitement in his voice.

"Rocket be damned," said Charles roughly. "That's a searchlight, and you know it. Where's it come from?"

"I don't know," said Chris lamely.

"Look here, Brent, I'm not satisfied. Hands up again. I'm going to make sure about you. Hands up, I say."

With a resigned gesture, Chris put up his hands and Charles came toward him, always

keeping him covered, and with his left hand he searched the pockets of Brent's dressing-gown. In the second one he came on a revolver. He looked from it to Brent, who this time met him with a quite different expression. For a moment the two men held each other's gaze; each expressed understanding and a grim determination.

"So that's it, is it?" asked Sanderson slowly.

"That's it," replied Chris.

"By Jove, you're a cold-blooded customer," and there was reluctant admiration in Sanderson's voice.

Brent now plunged his hands into his pockets and shrugged his shoulders slightly. "One can afford to be cold-blooded when one's going to win," he remarked casually.

"Going to win, eh?" asked Charles with a laugh. "My poor, dear friend, in a few moments you will be cold mutton."

"What a nasty simile!" remarked Brent, returning to his old affected manner. "I suppose, by the way, Sanderson, there's no objection to my having a last smoke?"

"By all means," replied his adversary politely, and he pushed a box of cigarettes toward him.

Another swift transfiguration of the room took place while Chris was lighting his cigarette, and showed his face looking pale, indeed, as it was bound to in that bright glare, but perfectly placid and contented. By some trick of the light and shadow, Sanderson's face took on for a fleeting moment the look of a death's-head. His eyes, very deeply set in their sockets, seemed pools of shadow, while his lips, usually so firmly closed, were drawn back and showing his teeth as he smiled at Brent. The next second the room was dark again, but Brent's swift Celtic imagination had been touched to an almost superstitious thrill at the sight.

"Smoking under fire, eh?" commented Charles, still smiling. "It shall be duly recorded in your obituary notice."

"So you intend to shoot me?" asked Chris pleasantly.

"Most certainly. You're caught at last, my dear Brent. You must see for yourself that I can't afford to let you go. As a special privilege I will shoot you with one of your own bullets." And he laid his own revolver on the table while he still kept Chris covered with the weapon he had discovered in the pocket of the dressing-gown.

Brent made a gesture with his hands as of one who appeals to the world at large. "Who says Germans have no sense of humor?" he demanded. "No account of my death would be complete unless your own peculiarly tasteful remarks were included, by dear Herr von Mantel."

"Oh, so you know that, do you?"

"Yes, I know that, and quite a lot of other things, too. I know, for instance, that you are not going to fire on me."

"Indeed, may I ask why?"

"For the very simple reason that you would rouse the house, and that, I fancy, is the last thing you wish to do."

"By Jove, you are a plucky chap. You seem to have made good use of your time, I must say."

"Yes," agreed Chris. "Diplomacy and spy-hunting are amusing recreations for the man who has to stay at home," and turning, Chris began to saunter toward the window.

"Stay where you are," ordered Charles fiercely, "or you'll be a dead man. I'll blow the whole lot of us to pieces with that box there."

Brent paused, and Sanderson swept swiftly between him and the window, still

keeping him covered. What Brent had been maneuvering for had come to pass, and making a dash at the table he snatched up Charles's revolver.

Charles sprang forward, but too late, and the next moment the two men were looking at each other over their leveled weapons.

"Shall we call it stalemate, eh, mein Herr?" asked Chris with his pleasant smile.

"To Hell with stalemate and with you, too," cried Charles, and aiming straight at the little box on the table he pulled the trigger of his revolver. The hammer clicked and that was all. No detonation followed. Brent was laughing outright by now.

"*Check*mate, I think," he observed. "A loaded revolver, my dear von Mantel, is a bad weapon for a diplomatist. I never carry one. By the way, I'm sorry to trouble you, but do you mind putting up your hands? It's very uncomfortable, I know, but it seems to be the smart thing to do here." He felt conscious of the bad taste of his gibe even as he uttered it, for he knew that he saw before him a heart-broken man. In that moment Charles had realized that he had been absolutely outplayed and not a loophole was

left to him. His years of work, his ambitions so nearly realized, were to come to nothing. He flung away the useless revolver and knew that his life, what remained of it to him, was as futile as the weapon. And there is nothing more ridiculous than an empty revolver in a moment of emotion.

"For God's sake, shoot me and have done with it," he said.

The sound of a shot pricked out into the night, but not from Brent's revolver. Pennicuik had fired his rifle. A thin cry rang out with its dying reverberations.

"What's that?" almost shouted Charles.

"It is, I trust, the end of Fritz's dangerous career. Pennicuik is quite a crack shot they tell me. No, don't move. Keep your hands up."

Again the bright light swept the room and died into darkness.

Brent was glad when the light swept away; the next moment the dull boom of naval guns broke upon their ears.

Charles half turned his head. "That," said Chris grimly, his pity vanishing at the thought of what this man had meant to happen that night, "that is a little practice for our gunners at a moving target. Submarines

are tricky things to hit, but I think they'll manage it all right."

"That was it then . . ." said Charles—"your signals—I understand," and maddened by rage and hopelessness he sprang towards Brent with his hands out.

CHAPTER XX

An extraneous circumstance stopped Charles in his dash at Brent, who, for his part, stood still where he was. The word "Halt!" in an authoritative voice rang from outside the window, and almost simultaneously came the sound of rifle butts being grounded on the veranda.

Instinctively Charles had checked, true German that he was, at the sound of the command. And now he saw his own revolver facing him, implacable as ever, as Brent circled slightly round the table. "Too late, von Mantel. Keep quiet. Come in, corporal," Brent added, raising his voice.

The corporal opened the window and stepped into the room followed by Pennicuik and a couple of other men with fixed bayonets.

"Private Pennicuik told us what's up, sir," said the corporal, saluting. "What can we do?"

"Take charge of this man."

"A spy, sir?" asked the corporal, with restrained joy in his voice.

"The head of them. Better search him for weapons." Brent still kept the muzzle pointed on Charles, while the three soldiers searched his pockets at the order of the corporal.

"Sorry, von Mantel, but it's necessary," said Brent. "Got your other man all right, corporal?"

"Yes, sir, he's on his way to the hospital."

"Ah, then you didn't kill him, Pennicuik?" asked Brent.

"No, I only winged him," replied that youth regretfully. It was something to have drawn blood, but he felt it would have been more exciting to have killed his man. "He'll mend for a better shot," he added, cheering up.

"There's nothing on the prisoner, sir," answered the corporal as the search ended.

"Very well, take him in charge," ordered Brent; "by George, there's everybody in the house wakened up now. Heavens, what explanations there'll have to be!"

Indeed, footsteps and raised voices were audible in the passage and the next moment the door was flung open to admit Miss Myrtle, Mr. Pollock, and Molly. They were in various stages of undress, Mr. Pollock with only

a tweed coat over his night-shirt, so that his bare and remarkably furry legs showed lank and long.

Another blinding ray of the searchlight swept the room, showing up the little group vividly, and bewildering the newcomers still further. At the gleam of the bayonets Miss Myrtle, who was still all confused by the effects of her sleeping draught, gave a loud scream. "It's the Germans, the Germans!" she cried. "Mr. Pollock, save me!" and flung herself upon his unresponsive chest.

"Don't be a fool, woman," cried Mr. Pollock frantically, and he switched on all the lights. The extraordinary figure he made would have drawn all eyes under less strenuous conditions; as it was his absurdity passed as unnoticed as Molly's white-wrappered, blue-ribboned loveliness. As for Miss Myrtle, in a crimson flannel dressing-gown and woolly slippers, she was a delight. True British indignation at having been disturbed in his night's rest glowed in Mr. Pollock's face. Sheer hysteria showed in Miss Myrtle's, but Molly's was set and pale like a mask. In that white flash from the searchlight she had seen Chris, looking so much graver than usual, and in his dress-

ing-gown and slippers, as though he had been taken from his bedroom, surrounded by soldiers. It leaped to her brain that Chris *was* a spy after all and that these men had come for him. A mental illumination, truer than that of the searchlight by whose gleam she had leaped to such an untrue conclusion, swept her mind at the same instant. There comes to everyone once or twice in life a moment of absolute clarity such as this; when all values suddenly assume a new scale, which yet is recognized at once as the true one. This is what had happened to Molly now. She saw that, as Chris had told her, an idea was the most important thing in life, only instead of being an impersonal idea as his was, hers was based on her feeling for him. The mental obsession of her life for the next few years would be her attitude toward Chris. That this should be so was a tremendous advance on her previous preoccupation as to his attitude toward her. She saw that it was more satisfying to love than to be loved, and that, no matter what Chris had done, her horror at the action would be drowned in her love for him even though it poisoned its waters.

All this swept into Molly's life as swiftly

as the searchlight, though it stayed behind when that had passed and was to remain even when she found she had been mistaken in her premises. So when Mr. Pollock switched the lights up she said nothing, only gazed at Chris.

"Well, now, what's all this about?" fussed Mr. Pollock, the J.P. in him rising superior to his costume. "Sanderson, what the devil's the matter?" and he advanced toward Charles, who stood pale and mute.

"Stand back," ordered Brent sharply.

There was a moment's absolute petrifaction, during which Mr. Pollock stared at Chris with mingled rage and incredulity.

"Stand back, indeed!" he blustered. "I shall do nothing of the kind. I'm an English magistrate, sir. As a Justice of the Peace, I must insist . . ."

"I'm afraid you will have to stand back, sir," replied Brent politely, but with a certain enjoyment which he would have been more than human not to feel. "We have just been capturing a spy."

"A spy!" Miss Myrtle's reedy pipe and Mr. Pollock's boom came out simultaneously.

Molly said nothing, but relief flared into her eyes.

"Pennicuik, you're here, thank goodness!" cried Mr. Pollock. "Perhaps you will kindly explain?"

"Fire ahead, Pennicuik," agreed Brent, reverting to his nonchalant manner as he foresaw that the flood-tide of gratitude poured on him by his fellow-boarders would be harder to bear than its lowest ebb had been.

"It's quite true what Mr. Brent says," began Pennicuik. He had seen the direction of Molly's gaze and knew that for her he himself practically did not exist. But even if there had been any rivalry possible his natural generosity would still have given Brent all the credit possible. "It's entirely thanks to him," he went on, "that we've captured the spy and that we are not all dead tonight."

"What on earth are you talking about, sir? It sounds the most preposterous rubbish. Why doesn't Mr. Sanderson answer me?"

"Because he's the spy," explained Pennicuik. "You see that box"—pointing to it as it still stood on the table—"if you look inside you will find it's an infernal machine timed to explode when you were all safely asleep."

This was making things seem almost too real, and even Miss Myrtle was too horrified to scream. Mr. Pollock turned his bewildered face—for all his convictions, including that most sacred one, his belief in his own judgment, had been upset—toward Sanderson.

"Is this true?" he asked him almost in a whisper.

"You heard them say so," replied Charles unemotionally. "Under the circumstances it would be futile for me to deny that I have been working for my Fatherland. I have lost, that is all. The Fatherland will find other servants."

At that moment the boom-boom of heavy firing came again from the sea—report after report, to the tune of half a dozen or so. Poor old Miss Myrtle, terrified almost entirely out of what little sense she had, collapsed on the sofa and buried her head in the cushions, moaning.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Pollock.

"A German naval disaster, with any luck," said Pennicuik cheerfully. "The loss of a few submarines, I hope. This house was going to have been burned down as a signal to 'em, but Brent stopped it. Brent had

our cruisers sent here and caught the whole nest of spies. It's all his doing."

A struggle took place in Mr. Pollock's mind. He ought, he knew, as a good-hearted, church-going gentleman, to be glad that Brent proved to be a purposeful and devoted man instead of a brainless lounger. He tried to be glad and succeeded in thinking he was glad. He shook Brent's hand heartily.

"We can never thank you enough, my boy," he boomed. "You have saved all our lives and you have been damned clever about it, too. It just goes to prove what I have always said, that much as we owe to the men away fighting for us at the front, we owe every bit as much to those who, like yourself, have been brave enough to stay at home."

Brent's eyes glanced across at Molly and secret laughter met in her eyes and his. In that momentary flash of humorous comprehension, a true comradeship was established between them that not all their love-making had attained.

"And you have actually bagged the whole lot of them?" went on Mr. Pollock, still shaking his head. "Magnificent, really magnificent!"

"No, he hasn't," contradicted Charles, with a note of triumph in his voice. "He hasn't got my mother or Fräulein Schroeder or Mrs. Lee. Mrs. Lee's one of us, you know, and they have taken her with them."

"In a way I am almost sorry to have to contradict you," said Brent courteously, "but your statement is not quite accurate. Mrs. Lee has taken them with her, which is not quite the same thing."

"What do you mean?" asked Charles hoarsely.

"I mean that Mrs. Lee, like myself, is employed by the English Government, and that the two plain-clothes men who came down in the train with you to-day were the escort she used for your mother and Fräulein Schroeder."

"I don't believe it," cried Charles violently. "It isn't possible. By God, Brent, I'll——"

"Keep back," ordered the corporal. "Close up, men. Is there anything more, sir?" he added, turning to Brent.

"Nothing at present, I think, corporal. Oh, wait a minute, isn't that the telephone?"

Everyone listened and a faint, insistent ringing was heard from the hall.

"I'll see what it is. Don't remove the prisoner yet, corporal," ordered Chris.

Several minutes passed before he came back, and as he had shut the door after him, those in the sitting-room did not hear even a one-sided conversation—a fact which annoyed Mr. Pollock considerably. He was just wondering whether the corporal would allow him to go into the hall, where he would insist to Brent on his right, as a J.P., to be told what was going on, when Miss Myrtle diverted his attention. Finding the strain of waiting too much for her, she rose, made a wavering but determined dash in his direction, and fainted away in his reluctant arms.

CHAPTER XXI

MIRIAM'S task that night had been not so much difficult as supremely unpleasant. Nevertheless she knew how easily one little chance thing going wrong may upset the most perfectly laid plans, and her heart was pounding heavily with mingled anxiety and excitement as she waited in the car for the other women. She herself was at the wheel, because the physical strength of both the plain-clothes men might be needed to prevent any unforeseen action on the part of Mrs. Sanderson and Fräulein when they learned the truth. The car had a berline body, so that Miriam and the man beside her were both of them inside; the other man sat with his back to them on one of the small seats, so as to face the prisoners. The car was a heavy one for Miriam to drive, but it had a self-starter and ran easily.

Already Miriam's gauntleted hands clutched the wheel, more in nervousness than in preparation. The difference between her and Brent was that, whereas he was always strung to a greater gayety and coolness when

events were at the critical point, she, although she never lost her head, went through agonies with nervous tension.

Now her feelings were very much those of an actress who suffers acutely from stage fright just before she goes on to the stage. Miriam's blood seemed to be pounding through her head, her hands felt icy cold. She knew that, humanly speaking, nothing should go wrong with their plans—and yet how easy it was for the unforeseen to happen. Miriam was more like a man than like the usually accepted type of woman, in that her anxiety was entirely for her work and not any personal fear for those engaged in it. She was fairly sure nothing untoward could happen to Chris, because she was impressed by his own belief in his luck, but even had she not been, her deep affection for him would have been merged in the importance of what he and she were doing together. Miriam was by temperament the true adventurer, which is a very different thing from an adventuress.

The car was drawn up behind a curve of the shrubbery which edged the short drive. It was very dark there, for the lamps were out and no gleam from the house was visible.

The door of the car stood open, one of the men beside it; and Miriam strained her ears for the sound of the approaching footsteps. Presently they came, the short, pattering footsteps she was expecting. The swathed bulk of Mrs. Sanderson with the smaller but not less rotund form of Fräulein beside her, loomed through the gloom as patches darker still. With relief surging at her heart, Miriam got out of the car and went toward them.

"Here you are, my comrades," she said, speaking in German, but very low. "These are my friends, the comrades I told you about. Is everything done? Are we free to start?"

"Everything is done," replied Fräulein; "that is to say, everything is in readiness. Charles has nothing to do but to set the bomb and see that Fritz does his work properly, then they will come on and join us in London in time to get away while it is still early morning."

"And everyone else? The English? Are they all in bed?" asked Miriam.

"Yes, they are in bed. I wish I could have given them all the same sleeping draught I gave to Miss Myrtle, but I do not doubt they

will sleep sound enough without it. They will sleep the sleep from which they will never awaken," and the ecstasy in Fräulein's voice thrilled oddly through the darkness.

"Come, come," urged Mrs. Sanderson, "do not let us talk here. Let us get away. It had to be done to-night, but I couldn't bear to see it; let us get far away as quickly as possible."

"You are right. We must not waste time," said Miriam. "See, you two sit here as far back as possible. Herr Schmidt will sit opposite you and his friend by me. The luggage is already on the roof."

The two women took their places in the car, and Miriam and "Herr Schmidt" tucked rugs round them so deftly that the throwing of them off would not be a very easy matter. Then Miriam took her place at the wheel again. Her heart had left off racking her with its heavy beats. Now that the time for action had come she felt cold and calm. Her pulses were unhurried, her brain clear. It had been the waiting that tried her so severely. She switched on the head-lamps and started the car, and the next moment they were running silently out on to the high road.

The road down to Eastermouth was not very good, and short as the way was Miriam was most anxious that no contre-temps such as a burst tire should delay them.

Supposing, for instance, that Charles and Fritz managed to escape from the house and come up with them upon the road, she and the detectives would be outnumbered, and the whole gang might manage to make their escape in the car. It was an extreme supposition, but Miriam knew that it was as well to think of everything as far as possible.

Accordingly she drove carefully along the precipitous and heavily rutted road, the soil of which was sticky from recent rains. The police-station had of course been warned of their coming, and as Eastermouth, being a seaside town, was in complete darkness, Miriam had no fear that the scene which might take place in the street would attract too much notice. All was certainly going well, and yet it seemed to her that as the car descended the winding road her spirits too dropped in ratio with the descent.

It was true that she carried with her in the car two would-be murderesses, but she carried also their trust and confidence, which

she had lied excessively hard to attain. Under the circumstances she really did not mind betraying their trust and confidence in the least. What she minded was the sea of her own lies she had had to wade through. If the matter had rested with her she would have had the whole household arrested directly after the affair of the shot pigeon. She had none of Brent's enjoyment in balancing on a tight-rope over an abyss. The sooner the whole thing was over and settled the better she would be pleased, and then would follow for her one of those little calms during which she tried to make herself believe she enjoyed her well-earned repose, but which only lasted until the insatiable desire for action was too strong for her again.

Miriam coaxed the car round the sharp turn that led into one of the by-streets of Eastermouth, and, slowing down, drove cautiously along it toward where the gleam of a red light showed her the police-station was awaiting them. The next moment she stopped the car in front of the open door.

"What is the matter?" asked Fräulein sharply, leaning forward. "There is nothing gone wrong with the car, has there?"

"No, nothing's wrong with the car," re-

plied Miriam, half-turning round in her seat, and slipping her hand into the big pocket of her overcoat till she felt her fingers close over the butt of her small but very useful revolver. "We have arrived at our journey's end, that's all."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Sanderson. "Have you some new plan? Ach!——" she ended, on a scream, for she saw that the car had been quietly surrounded by police.

Miriam said nothing because she could not think of anything to say. It seemed to her that the car was charged full of fear and hate and rage which were almost tangible things beating about her head. So much so that she let go of her revolver and her hands flew up instinctively, to cover her ears and eyes.

It was with a sharp feeling of relief, as of one brought back from some nightmare to reality, that she head the car-door open and the voice of the inspector saying the familiar words of arrest. Then the thing that she had half-expected to happen did happen. Fräulein, who had struggled herself free from the enveloping wraps, dived into her pocket with her free hand—her left arm was

held by the erstwhile Schmidt. A cry from Miriam warned him and he caught Fräulein's other hand too, as she was snatching out a ready-cocked automatic.

This little incident gave Miriam the feeling of unreality which she had felt on first seeing the Marconi installation, and in consequence she again felt the old uplifting of the adventurer spirit. As long as the affair was sufficiently melodramatic she could enjoy it thoroughly. It was the hours of idleness which bred criticism and depression.

"This all of them?" asked the inspector of her, as Mrs. Sanderson and Fräulein were practically lifted out of the car and stood upon the pavement.

Miriam laughed aloud in her relief at the easing of the strain. "That's all of this little lot, inspector," she said. "I am expecting Mr. Brent to provide you with two more later on."

"Ah, with the men, yes," replied the inspector. "This seems a pretty serious affair. Take the prisoners inside. Sims, you stay here with the car. Now, madam, if you will come in with me."

They went into the police-station, and here again the sense of drab reality and sordid-

ness shut down upon Miriam once more. The bare walls, the shiny wooden counter, the hard chairs, the stolid, uniformed men with their unimaginative faces, all these things seemed an inadequate background to the tragedy of the prisoners. Not that there was anything except the expression on their faces to redeem them either from the outwardly commonplace. But Miriam, with that intuitive prescience which made her so invaluable in her work, could guess at the tumult of mortification and despair which must be raging within those portly muffled forms. Indeed, the commonplaceness of Mrs. Sanderson's plump and usually comely face only increased by sheer force of contrast the horror of the look that was on it now. She seemed to have grown an old woman in a few minutes. Her cheeks were pendulous and blotched with pallor, her blue, somewhat prominent eyes were glazed, and her mouth hung quivering and open. She kept on murmuring a few sentences over and over again to herself. Miriam caught the words, "My son, my son. . . ."

Fräulein was more self-possessed. Her broad, rather flat face with the sharp and jutting features that seemed so curiously at

variance with it, was always the color of parchment and looked hardly whiter now. Her bird-like eyes gleamed with a malevolent despair, not the fixed horror of Mrs. Sanderson's. Her compact little mouth was set even more firmly than usual. She looked Miriam thoughtfully up and down in the glare of the flickering gas-jets.

"So you have betrayed us," she remarked.

"If you care to put it that way," replied Miriam, "but I should not have thought you would have talked about betrayals."

"I was only doing my duty. If I could I would sink the whole town, the whole country, into the seas, for the glory of the Lord and of Germany."

"My goodness, how they do hate us!" exclaimed the inspector in mild surprise. "It fair gives one a turn. I have got the charge sheet made out, Mrs. Lee. Is there anything else you have to tell me?"

"Wait," put in Fräulein—and such was the dominant quality this drab little woman possessed that everyone turned to listen to her.

"There are a few things I must ask Mrs. Lee first. Tell me, you are not alone in this, hein? Brent, he is in it too?"

"Yes, Mr. Brent and I are working together for the English Intelligence Department."

Fräulein drew what was almost a breath of satisfaction. It is something even in defeat to learn that one's instincts were correct. "Ah, I thought so," she observed. "What is he doing up at the house? Is he having Charles arrested?" She fixed her bird-like eyes on Miriam, hoping against hope as she spoke, that perhaps, after all, everything had not been discovered and that the bomb might yet go off and at least revenge them even if Charles and Fritz perished also.

Miriam guessed the little woman's thought and was aware of a not unnatural feeling of chill. "I should imagine," she replied steadily, "that by now Mr. Pennicuik has shot Fritz and that the soldiers Mr. Brent had in readiness have arrested Charles von Mantel. Also I don't doubt that the bomb has long since been put out of action."

"Ah, so you do know all," commented Fräulein, as a low moan burst from Mrs. Sanderson. "Then there remains nothing." Her little thin black silk bag was still in her hands, and now she burrowed in it and pro-

duced a large handkerchief which she proceeded to put to her face.

Miriam felt a moment's surprise as she watched her. She had never imagined Fräulein would weep under any circumstances. The next moment she had guessed, but it was already too late. With a convulsive movement, Fräulein had rapidly swallowed something which had been concealed in the handkerchief. The inspector and the other men were still gazing at her uncertainly when Miriam sprang forward.

"Stop her," she cried. "Oh, it's too late! Get a doctor at once, she's taken poison."

It was about ten minutes after this that Miriam rang up Chris and told him they were bringing Fräulein back to the house. The hospital was on the far side of the town and Fräulein, before she lapsed into unconsciousness, had strenuously demanded that she should be taken back to Wave Crest. Whether in her already clouded brain she was obsessed by the idea that perhaps, after all, Charles had succeeded in firing the house and wished to see it for herself; or whether it were not the mere blind tenacity of her failing purpose which was still fixed instinctively on the place where she had worked, it

was impossible to say. There was at least nothing against it and Fräulein was undoubtedly dying, so she was allowed to have her way. This time a policeman drove the car and others rode on the steps, and so Fräulein and Mrs. Sanderson were taken back once more to the house which they had thought never to see again.

CHAPTER XXII

Neither Brent nor Molly ever forgot entirely the night that followed. To Molly the whole thing seemed like a nightmare. The atmosphere was charged not only with impending death and futile rage and bitter disappointments, but with actual evil. It seemed to her, so unused to contact with such things, actually to pervade the air. Fräulein had been carried in, a little, twisted, convulsive figure in her brown wrappings, her unconscious face dewed and twisted. Her jerkings were horrible to see, and Molly, who with the rest had crowded into the hall, turned and fled down the passage to the sitting-room again; where she remained huddled up in an armchair, shaking with what was more distaste than fear.

Chris had not followed her there. In that disorganized household someone had to take the lead and it devolved naturally on him. The case was hopeless, as everyone could see from the first, but still the doctor did all he could and Mrs. Sanderson sat in a kind of

stony despair by the bed. Mr. Pollock went booming round the house. Miss Myrtle, feeling neglected, had hysterics and brandy-and-soda in her room, and Charles remained —always with that fixed immobility of his— in the room next to Fräulein's, his guard around him. So much Chris had conceded to the misery and terror of Mrs. Sanderson.

When the house was fairly reduced to order, Chris went in search of Molly. He looked in her room, but she was not there, and he knew enough of her to be sure she would not be seeking solace either with Miss Myrtle or her father. He went to his own room, wondering if she had gone there to look for him, but that, too, was empty. And when he went down to the sitting-room he found he had been forestalled. Miriam, whose life had taught her to think of everyone's feelings when the work in hand permitted her to do so, had no sooner done all she could for Fräulein than she went in search of Molly. She had seen her rush from the hall and had realized what the whole affair must mean to a girl who probably had never come across anything worse than a cut finger in the whole of her life. She had found Molly hiding her face in the cushion and shaking all over.

Growing up is a perfectly natural process if the ordinary time is allowed for it, but when a normal law suffers violent upheaval it can become unnatural, and Molly had done all her growing up since the morning before. The nervous and mental strain had consequently been very much more intense than if the usual experiences of life had gradually unfolded themselves to her step by step.

That little nightmare of a writhing figure in brown and the knowledge of what had gone to bring it to that state was so overpowering to Molly that in the shadow of it the whole scheme of life seemed wicked and unbearable. She supposed she loved Chris, but after all what was love in the face of these events which it was so powerless to affect? She did not think, as she would have done the night before, that because Chris did not come to her, therefore he did not love her. She knew that he could not and was even able to feel that she would have loved him less if he had. But nevertheless, in the whirlpool of these events which took no heed of her, as a person negligible to either side, she felt terribly alone and unhappy. She needed personal comfort; and Miriam, who had long outgrown any such thing for herself,

knew that such must be the case. As a woman who has suffered much will, she saw her own youth in Molly and was tender of it accordingly. Miriam was feeling rather shattered herself. It had not been pleasant to realize by Fräulein's sudden convulsion at the police-station that she had managed to take poison. It had not been pleasant, if it came to that, to witness the fury and misery of the two women when they found they had been tricked. Miriam, like Chris, had moments of loathing the necessities of her work. The drive back to the house had partaken of the nature of a nightmare, herself and the doctor seated on either side of the unconscious but convulsed form. The fact that Fräulein in her mania had been quite prepared to sacrifice half-a-dozen lives did not entirely dissipate the discomfort Miriam felt that, primarily through her action, this one life was drawing to such a tragic close. She too was anxious to keep doing something, and her thoughts had turned to Molly because she knew that there she was really needed.

Just as Molly was feeling frantic almost to hysteria point, strong arms came round her, she felt her tangled hair being smoothed away from her wet face and her dressing-

gown wrapped more warmly round her shivering little figure.

"There, my dear," said Miriam's warm, rather husky voice. "There's nothing to mind about now. Everything's all right and everything's going to be all right."

It was one of those moments when someone of her own sex is more to a woman than a man could be. When once the stress of emotional scenes was over, these two would dislike each other again as much as ever. Molly would always distrust Miriam, while for her part, the widow, while allowing that Molly was a "sweet little thing," would always consider her totally uninteresting. But just now Molly flung herself on Miriam, clinging hold of her, and Miriam held her tightly—and both women were sincere, though if they were to repeat the performance when life had righted itself, it would become pretense.

Miriam fetched a rug and wrapped Molly up, then disappeared to return in a few minutes with the homely but comforting remedy of hot milk. While Molly was drinking it she brushed out her hair and mopped her face with rose-water; and added a dusting of powder, all of which, especially the last,

did more to make Molly feel herself again than any amount of brandies-and-sodas or conversation would have done.

"There," said Miriam at length, giving a final pat to Molly's hair. "Now you're feeling better, aren't you?"

"Oh, you are good," said Molly, "but you only make me feel worse in a way. To think how I have been hating you . . ."

"Never mind, it was quite natural, and it's all over now, anyway."

"All over," repeated Molly. "Yes, everything's all over—you are quite right there."

Miriam paused, brush in hand, and looked at her inquiringly.

"What do you mean when you repeat it like that?" she asked. "What's all over?"

"Everything between me and Chris."

"My dear child, excuse me, but what utter nonsense. You are just tired out, that's what's the matter, and you're seeing everything out of focus. Everything's going to begin all over again for you and Chris, and going to be much better than ever before."

"I don't see how it can," said Molly miserably. "I'm sort of feeling two things at once. I don't know how to explain it."

"Try and tell me about it," suggested Miriam, sitting down beside her.

"Well, it's like this," began Molly. "Part of me feels that I am not worthy of Chris and that he's been so great and wonderful and splendid and saved all our lives, while I was being petty and self-absorbed and let myself suspect him of all sorts of dreadful things. I don't see how he can ever forgive me or feel the same to me again. And the other part of me——" she paused.

"Well, go on," encouraged Miriam.

"It sounds very absurd, but the other part of me can't forgive Chris. You see, he's lied and lied and lied to me. Of course, I can quite see he had to, and I know he hated doing it, but still the fact remains that he can, doesn't it? And I can't help feeling that now I should always be uncertain about Chris, about what to believe. Just when I was loving him most, and he was being nicest, I should think, 'I wonder if this is true or whether he is only saying it?' Oh, it sounds horrid of me, but don't you see what I mean?"

Miriam nodded and took both of Molly's hands in hers. "I quite see what you mean, my dear," she said, "but won't it make a

difference to you when I tell you that Chris sees it too? It's what he's been afraid of, but I have known him a great many years now, and I can tell you this, that he has always realized the danger of his work—that it might upset his values, I mean, and make him think less of lying than other people—and the consequence is that he is more rigorous than any other man I know in his personal affairs. You could always believe him about anything like that. And, Molly, I don't know how much you know of the world, but you surely know that there are not many men who could be such a good pal to me as he has been, without ever saying or doing or thinking anything that one man might not do or say or think in relation to another. . . . Ask any of his friends and they will all tell you Christopher Brent is the straightest pal on earth."

"I know. I'm sure he is," replied Molly a little more cheerfully, "but you must see it is difficult to feel quite the same about it at first, isn't it? It isn't that I blame Chris for any single thing he's done. It was his duty, and I think he has been splendid. It's only that it's a little—well—disconcerting—to find he could deceive one so well."

"Suppose you forget about your side of it for a bit, Molly. Realize that Chris hated it just as much as you do, only for his country's sake he had to sacrifice everything, even you, if necessary. He has had an awful strain in these last twenty-four hours, my dear, and it's up to you to make him happy now it's all over."

The idea caught at Molly's imagination and she sat up eagerly, fresh life kindling in her face.

"If I can do that," she began, then stopped as Chris himself came in.

"There you are, Molly!" he exclaimed. "You poor little thing! I have been looking for you everywhere, and now I can't stop with you after all. I must go upstairs again. Miriam, you had better come too; the doctor says it's only a question of a few minutes."

Miriam stood up and once again Molly had the feeling of being slipped into the background while more important things were attended to. She looked after them, and the tears rushed uncontrollably to her eyes. But the next minute Brent ran into the room and came up to the back of her chair as she knelt upright on the seat looking over it.

"Don't go to bed, sweetheart, wait for

me," he whispered, and taking her head between his hands he made as if to kiss her, then checked himself and went quickly out of the room again.

Molly remained kneeling up in the chair, then with sudden determination she too went out and up the stairs, and crept toward the door of the room where Fräulein lay.

CHAPTER XXIII

FRÄULEIN lay drawn up in a contorted position under the bedclothes, her head was pressed right back into the pillow, so that her ashen pale features jutted sharply up from it. A little froth lay at the corners of her mouth. Her eyes were open and staring, but she was quite unconscious.

Mrs. Sanderson sat by the bed shuddering violently. Her motor bonnet was off and her fair, grayish hair was disordered and hung about her tear-wet face. She held the dying woman's wrist and kept on appealing to her by name as though to pierce her fluttering consciousness. Charles sat beside her, and the only expression in his pale, impassive face was sheer distaste for the whole affair. Nevertheless, what remnants of humanity the downfall of his hopes had left him were centered in his mother, and, since he was permitted to sit with her through these most trying moments of all, he did his best to comfort her by dint of stern calm rather than by any consolation. Two soldiers stood just

behind him and two more were at the door. Molly did not attempt to pass them, but stood looking in. She was almost past horror. It seemed to her by now that a nightmare had become the usual mode of life. Miriam was already beside the doctor on the other side of the bed. Chris stood by the window looking out of it. He felt the long-drawn painfulness of the scene rather as Charles did, as an infliction that had to be borne. But although the dying woman had been Charles's companion, it was Chris who was the more moved by the sight. It was not a pleasant death, not the quiet and inevitable drawing to the full of one who dies in due time, but rather a sudden and violent disruption of the life tissues. Everything that was sordid and ugly in the work of spies seemed concentrated and fused in the stiffening figure on the bed.

Charles and his mother were both, in their different ways—his clear-clut and positive, hers muddled and hopeless—aware that all the glamor and glory had been stripped off their exploits. No one engaged in what was glorious would have been driven to end like Fräulein; that was the bare fact, and there was no getting away from it. Even the silent

soldiers posted about the room were dimly conscious that the excitement and the thrill of the spy-hunt had dwindled to a terrible drabness. There seemed no glory on their side either, only unpleasant necessity.

Suddenly a more violent convulsion than ever before jerked Fräulein's body up upon the bed, and in that moment her distorted, passionate spirit passed.

Chris, who had turned from the window to come to the bed's foot, was conscious of an immeasurable feeling of relief as though a heavy weight which had been pressing on all of them in that house was lifted. He became in a moment the man of decisive action again. In a low, quick voice he ordered the removal of Charles, and as he himself conferred with the doctor and the inspector he saw out of the corner of his eye that Miriam was attending to Mrs. Sanderson.

"She had better be taken down to the police-station," he ordered. "You can't possibly sit up any longer, Miriam, and there she can have a woman-warder with her. Corporal, you take Herr von Mantel with you. You have got the bomb, haven't you?"

"It's waiting outside in a bucket of water, sir."

"Very well, that's all, then. Tell the Colonel I'll come down and see him in the morning."

Molly crouched back against the wall of the corridor as von Mantel with his guards passed along it, followed by Mrs. Sanderson between Miriam and the inspector. Then Chris came to the door of the room. The light was behind him, so that his figure showed dark, but even so she could see by the sudden droop of it how worn-out he looked. Her brain registered the fact unconsciously, though naturally at that moment the stark horror of what she had seen possessed her to the exclusion of everything else. She ran toward him with a frantic cry.

"Chris, take me away," she sobbed. "Take me out of this or I shall go mad. Oh, Chris, Chris!"

"Why, Molly, what did you come up for? How wrong of you! You poor child," and, putting his arms round her, Chris picked her up bodily. She let her head fall on his shoulder, but still clung to him tensely. "You must go to bed, Molly," went on Chris.

"No, no," she begged, "don't send me to bed. I can't bear it. I shan't ever sleep."

"But what shall I do with you, sweetheart? I am dead beat myself."

Molly had the first moment of genuine inspiration of her life. "Put me down a minute, Chris," she whispered, and running to the big window at the end of the corridor she pulled aside the heavy curtains. A cold, pure, gray light suffused the passage, the first breath of dawn. The garden still lay dark, but beyond it the sea glimmered palely and a line of gold gleamed at the rim.

"Let's go out, Chris," said Molly, "just for a few moments. Look at the sky and the sea, it all looks so clean. . . ."

Brent turned her face up toward his and scrutinized it in the wan light. Even Molly's triumphant prettiness showed signs of weariness: there were dark marks under her eyes and she was very pale, but Chris thought he had never seen her look so pretty, or rather more than pretty. This was indeed Undine after she had found her soul . . . but, as he looked, he gave a sigh to the lovely thoughtlessness that was gone. . . .

All he said, with the absurdly boyish note in his voice she had always liked, was: "Molly, darling, how frightfully clever of you! Come along, before anybody catches

us." He took her hand and together they hastened down the stairs. In the hall he insisted on muffling her up in a big coat. Then they went across the veranda into the garden. The lawn was covered with innumerable twinkling points of dew and the glossy leaves of the laurel shone bright. The shrill, confused chirping of the birds came from the elm trees. Chris and Molly went to the little gate that led on to the cliff path and stood there looking over the sea. The destroyers had gone; nothing remained to tell of the events of the night before, and the slowly brightening sea looked as innocent of war as the quiet of the English garden in which the two stood.

Chris caught Molly to him.

"Dear little sweetheart," he said. "The nightmare's over. Look up at me."

"I—I—can't," said Molly, "I feel so ashamed. Oh, Chris, to think we were all criticising you and that all the time you were being so wonderful and splendid!"

"Don't be a little goose, darling. I wasn't wonderful and splendid a bit. I was only doing my job. And I tell you, I'm jolly glad it's over, if it's only so that you can be nice to me again."

"How can you want to have anything more to do with me?" asked Molly; "narrow-minded, silly little prig, that's what I am."

"Molly, I shall shake you. Do you know what you are? You are the dearest, sweetest, goodest little child there ever was. When I think of all you give me, I squirm, yes, I do, darling, I positively squirm."

But Molly shook her head and refused to be comforted.

Suddenly Chris changed his tactics and appealed to the new Molly whom he felt had come to life that day.

"Sweetheart," he said, "I am just about all in. Don't worry me any more. I'm so tired, I hardly know what I am doing, and so sick of the whole sordid affair and the wretchedness of it. Nobody need think it's been a glorious or a wonderful experience; distorted human nature is the most appalling thing one could come up against. Now it's all over I feel like a pricked balloon."

Molly's hand stole out and she began gently to stroke his hair.

"Oh, it's been hateful," he burst out, for the first time regardless of what demands he made upon Molly and not seeking to spare her, "and there's that terrible little woman

lying upstairs now. I wish to Heaven they had burned the house down; it reeks of evil as though it could never be clean again. Ah, Molly, recapture your lovely gayety for my sake. Make me laugh. Don't let go of me."

Molly flung out her arms and pressed her cheek against him.

"Hush, Chris; hush, darling," she said. "It's all right now. You have got me to take care of you."

And she never guessed that Christopher had maneuvered for her to feel that flow of strengthening. She was sure that her arms could hold and support him, and he was self-reliant enough to be glad that she should herself be helped by the tender delusion.

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